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WHISPERS

BY LOUIS DODGE

WHISPERS

ROSY

A RUNAWAY WOMAN
Illustrated by George Wright

CHILDREN OF THE DESERT

BONNIE MAY
Illustrated by Reginald Birch

THE SANDMAN'S FOREST
Illustrated by Paul Branson

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

WHISPERS

By

LOUIS DODGE

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

NEW YORK : : : : : : 1920

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WHISPERS

Chapter I

What the Moon Found

THE small back room of the shop was so still that the ticking of the clock on the wall—a small, quick-spoken thing of nickel—was like the sounding of an alarm, or an agitated voice uttering a warning. A tedious sound by day, made little by the rumble of traffic on the street, it now possessed a quality at once sinister and urgent.

The street was deserted. The shops were closed and dark save for the night-lamps which burned dimly in the mean little temples of trade along the thoroughfare. Half an hour ago a policeman had passed along the pavement, peering through the grimy windows, trying the doors. He had made sure that no one was stirring. Later, far down the street, his stick on the pavement had shattered the stillness of the night.

In the back room where the clock ticked a man sat alone. His elbows rested on a table of a

dark, heavy wood, and his face was supported by his hands. A single incandescent light, protected by a green shade, was suspended above the table. It cast a circle of illumination on the dark wood of the table and on a very old book, curiously illustrated with wood cuts, which the man was reading. The figure of the man was outside that circle of illumination and was absorbed by the shadows which hung thick in the room.

Perhaps it was the ticking of the clock which presently disturbed the solitary occupant of the room—who, it might also have seemed, was the solitary occupant of the building, of all the buildings on the street. At any rate there was a noiseless movement. The man lifted slightly from his stooped attitude. He removed his eyes from the book before him. He permitted one hand to descend until it lay on the table, within the circle of light.

If the Book of Life had been as open to him as the ancient volume he had been perusing, that hand which now lay within the circle of light—the only living thing visible, and it scarcely suggesting the warm impulses of life—might well have fallen into an attitude of surrender, of relinquishment. Or it might have been lifted, for once in its existence, with a gesture of supplication or prayer. For it was written that that hand should lie cold and rigid in death within the hour.

But the Book of Life is not an open book to

any man; and so it was that the hand on the table made known no hint of contrition or humility. Rather it expressed the ruling passion dwelling in the brain which controlled it. It was a slender hand, long, colorless—and grasping. It was the hand of Sothern's *Shylock*. The fingers turned slightly at the ends, covetously, acquisitively—all save one. The little finger lay straight. It was held so by the long nail, which thwarted the inclination to curve.

That nail was, obviously, a matter of freakish pride. It was like a talon. It was slender, discolored, a little ghastly. It represented the growth of years—and how much of painstaking care, of proud display, of petty boasting!

For a moment the pale hand with its talon-like nail lay within the circle of light; and then it was withdrawn with startling swiftness.

No need to ask of the man who sat alone if he had been suddenly alarmed. The fact was plain. Out of the oppressive silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock, there had been the sound of a footfall.

The sound of a footfall; and—more disconcerting still to the man who heard it—in a region which should now have been a slumbering void. It was on the floor above, in a room which was seldom entered by day and never by night, where certain old articles were stored.

The man's body had become rigid, his pulses

were pounding. His head, lowered as if a blow was about to fall, turned slowly this way and that. He listened with painful intensity. Minutes passed, and with them the first shock of agonized terror.

It could have been no footfall, after all, he reflected. A distant shutter must have swung in the wind. Somewhere in an adjacent house a door must have been caught in a draft. Or perhaps a homeless vagrant had passed along the street. There was nothing in the storeroom above to attract thieves. There was no way to reach that room at night save by the fire-escape, descending to the dark alley. And—most reassuring of all—there was no repetition of that muffled sound.

The man began to breathe naturally again, his heart ceased to pound. He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the shadowy spaces surrounding him. Through the doorway connecting with the front of the shop he caught the faint gleam of glass surfaces: the fronts of certain cabinets in which rows of fantastic faces looked out fixedly. These constituted part of the stock of the shop, which was a costumer's shop. They were painted masks.

Droll or comic by day, they achieved a kind of ghastly lifelessness at night. Their rosiness paled; their grimaces suggested agony; the eyeholes were black as those of a human skull.

In other cabinets fantastic costumes were hung: the costume of a Spanish cavalier, of a monk, of Harlequin and Pierrot, of a seer, of a sorceress, of a gipsy, of a hangman. And though many of them held a laughing suggestion by day of secret delights and transgressions and revelries, they all hinted darkly at night of the end of all things, which is vanity.

Yet to the man in the back room they hinted at none of these things, but only of easy profits, and the follies of youth, from which calculating age may reap a benefit in gold, and of a discreet system of excessive profits exacted from those who came to rent his wares.

The back room, too, was given over in part to the costumer's stock. The wigs, the toupees, the false beards and mustaches—they were here. And most impressive of all the costumer's collection was the complete set of armor, with gleaming gauntlets and visor and shield and sword and all, which had its place, very like a medieval warrior, at the foot of the narrow staircase which ascended to the storeroom on the floor above.

Here the knight-like figure stood by day and night, with a certain spurious gallantry which was dissipated easily enough when a careless or curious customer touched it, and elicited the tinkle of tin, and set the whole frame to vibrating in a way which proved that it was but a hollow shell.

Yet just now, while the shadows of night filled

the room and the silence was unbroken, the spurious knight almost created the illusion of reality, of severity, of guardianship.

The man in the room turned once—as he was required to do—to note the reassuring presence of the armored knight, and then his mind became at peace again. He had no cause for fear. On the contrary, he had every reason for self-congratulation. He was making handsome profits day by day. The world was full of fools to whom gaiety was a kind of disease. Nothing had power to check their folly. Though the world might be coming to an end they would dance and posture and romp—and pay the fiddler. Nothing checked his progress along the pleasant path of prosperity. The fools would continue to bring their contributions to him though the world were coming to an end.

Though the world were coming to an end. . . .

The knight in armor at the foot of the stairway, just outside the closed door leading to the upper storeroom, underwent a mysterious change. He seemed to expand, to become alive. And yet he did not move. And almost immediately he resumed his former status: that of a lifeless and rather absurd figure.

The momentary transformation was due to a reflected light. The door behind him had opened very slowly, very slightly; but in moving it had caught the rays of light from the lamp in the

room and had reflected them upon the bright armor. And then by almost imperceptible degrees a face had appeared in the doorway.

A face—yet scarcely a face. The vague outlines of a face, occupying a position so high that it remained quite obscure in its place among the other shadows. Indeed, one would have guessed that the face was there only because of the unmistakable outlines of feet on the sill, and by a darkly luminous hint of staring eyes at the altitude where one might have expected to find a face.

The man at the table heard nothing. But human beings who thrive on the folly and gaiety of youth, and are pleased to do so, are sometimes possessed of a sense other than the original and common five. Prescience is the word usually employed when this sense is in mind—as if anyone had ever yet clearly defined that word.

Prescience it may have been: or perhaps a realization that the temperature of the room had changed, or that a draft had been liberated, or that the odor of disuse from the storeroom above had penetrated the room. At any rate the man at the table became suddenly and dreadfully alarmed. The thought of that muffled footstep returned with renewed and increased terror. He sprang to his feet and faced about. So conscious was he of looming disaster that he would have screamed for help within the moment.

But it was too late now. The door leading to the upper floor was flung wide open. An obscure figure was purposefully advancing toward him.

The costumer was no longer a young man, yet he was capable of great agility of movement. Moreover, at that moment terror lent swiftness to his limbs. A single step, a noiseless movement, and the light above the table had been extinguished. But the intruder had marked his location, even as the light was extinguished.

For an instant the drama between the two men in the dark was suspended. Then there was the sound of a blow. There was a groan, so short-lived that it ended in an almost tranquil sigh. A chair was overturned; a human body, collapsing, pitched headlong to the floor. There was a movement of feet; a tramping and creaking on the stairs, an echo overhead. And then there was silence, a terrible silence, broken only by the nickel clock which went on ticking monotonously.

Time passed: time, which no longer concerned the man who had crossed over into eternity. And now the shop seemed indeed really deserted.

The moon, arising above a thousand city housetops, entered upon an open area and sent its beams into the shop. At first they touched the shining armor of the knight by the doorway. They touched the door, revealing that it was now closed again, just as if nothing had happened.

And then they sank lower and lower against the wall until they were creeping along the floor. Again time passed, its passing now marked by the progress of a shaft of moonlight across the floor.

The shaft of light glorified one mean object after another: faint colors in an old rug, the legs of the table, the carved back of an overturned chair. And then it came upon an object which no power on earth or in heaven itself could glorify: a dead man's hand, curled at the finger tips. The moonbeams touched, with a kind of halting, perplexed inspection, a nail which grew, curiously curled and discolored, from a human finger.

And then at last the silence was rudely shattered. The door at the front of the shop was violently shaken, and then stormed. The policeman, making his rounds again, had peered into the spaces where the moonbeams searched out the silences, and he had seen an elderly man lying dead on the floor.

Chapter II

One of Our Masters

HIGH up above the street, above tier upon tier of darkened windows, a row of lights —so far above the pavement that they seemed like lanterns in the sky—shone steadily out upon the night. In one of the rooms from which these lights beamed a little man sat at a big desk alone.

He had stood at a window a moment before, looking out at the picture of the city at night. Grouped about him were immense office-buildings, like gigantic, perforated monoliths: with a beam of light showing in some of the perforations. He had watched while one light after another winked out, and he knew that when a light was extinguished it meant that one more belated clerk or draughtsman or bookkeeper had finished his work for the day and was about to set out for home. He felt an ironic contempt for those belated workers, whose tasks seemed to him humdrum and tedious and mean.

Now as he sat at his desk he was still picturing those perforated monoliths, and he was seeing one light after another as it was blotted out.

He knew that the great façades of the monoliths would be in total obscurity before long; and he liked to picture the belated clerks and other workers going home with drooping spirits and perhaps with rebellion stirring dully in their souls. The work of these other men, he thought, was inglorious, ant-like. No one's work save his own was really splendid. But his own work—how all-important it was! How like it was to the cap-sheaf and crown of all other men's activities!

He occupied one of the nerve-centers of the great city. There was a telephone instrument on the desk beside him. There was a telephone booth over against the wall. There were telephone instruments on a number of desks which were ranged about his own desk. There was a girl who, in an adjacent room, presided over a switchboard: who sat with her fingers within reach of a thousand wire-ends, and who, with an unsightly apparatus about her brow and ears, listened to the voice of the city, to the voice of the world.

The little man arose and moved once more to one of the windows looking out over the city; and as he stood, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, his countenance expressed at once a deep complacency and the cold pride of a cynic. There lay the city which he held in the hollow of his hand. Such was his reflection.

He leaned forward and looked down into the

street, where long lines of lights were burning brightly and where many vehicles passed to and fro. It was ten o'clock at night and the day's commercial traffic was finished; but the night life —the life of gaiety and pleasure—was getting under way. The vehicles down on the street appeared somewhat goblin-like; and the pedestrians who passed from pavement to pavement with spasmodic movements seemed strangely fearful and insignificant. Yet they were not insignificant to the man who gazed down upon them. He despised them—and yet it was they who brought grist to his mill. One of them might stumble and fall beneath swiftly-rolling wheels before the night was out—and be carried to the hospital, or to the morgue. Or one of them might even now be stealthily going forth to take the life of one of his kind; or he might be seeking the means of self-destruction. One might be an inglorious Othello, and another an unsung Cæsar. That obscure figure of a woman yonder might be a new Desdemona with a crude Iago by her side, or perhaps a proud Cleopatra of the people.

The little man's lips curled faintly and he mused: "Among them they will keep the hospitals filled, and the morgue occupied, and the courts busy, and the wheels of commerce revolving—and so I shall not want."

He was a newspaper man of the old school, Beakman by name. He believed in the policy of

ruling with an iron hand. To him the power of the press meant the browbeating of the friendless, the exposure of the weak, the thwarting of the ambitious; it meant a policy of conciliation toward the strong, of bargaining with the rich.

Just now he was afflicted with the tedium of Alexander. He could think of no more worlds to conquer. And he leaned further out into the warm June air and noted the flaming theater-fronts down the street, and the distant tangles and mazes of night traffic at a busy corner. Then with a kind of slow moroseness he returned once more to his desk.

He had scarcely seated himself this time when one of the telephones in the booth against the wall rang sharply, insistently.

He arose with a mumbled word of anger. Didn't the girl at the switchboard know that he was alone in the local room at present? And didn't she know that he had his own phone there on the desk before him?

He went into the booth, leaving the door open behind him.

He took down the receiver and in an instant he was listening to the voice of Cook, the police reporter. "Ah, Cook!" he said; and the sense of tedium left him now. Manna was descending from his heaven. He was always glad to hear from police headquarters. It so often meant that grist was coming to his mill.

He leaned close to the instrument. It was sometimes a little difficult to get Cook's messages. The police reporter mumbled his words as a rule, and his sentences were often incoherent and his diction peculiarly colloquial. He was an illiterate man whose abilities were confined almost wholly to a complete lack of sensibilities and what Beakman would have described as a sharp nose for news.

Beakman's first contribution to the conversation over the wire—after a professionally weary "Yes, this is Beakman,"—was one word, uttered in a low yet rather intense tone: "Drumm?" And then, "Old Pheneas Drumm, do you mean?"

He then waited for Cook to proceed, remaining silent save for the repetition of some of Cook's most highly specialized communications—as for example, "He was a crappie when they found him. Yes. His thatch was leaking—smashed in. All right. A blunt instrument. Yes. But, Cook—hold up, Cook! Get off o' that *blunt instrument.* Yes, I know that's what the police report says. It always says it. But we don't want the *News* to say it. It's been said too often. Now go ahead. Nothing disturbed. All right. And—well, never mind the police theory, Cook. They don't know whether it was a vendetta or not. And put that word *vendetta* up in Aunt Maud's room, together with your *blunt instrument.* You know we're not conducting a mu-

seum, Cook. It's a newspaper. Just get at the facts, so far as there are any facts, and put them into plain English, and not in the jargon of the police report. All right, now. So—they found old Drumm dead, all surrounded by false faces. Oh, I say, Cook—there's a touch for you, those false faces. Be sure to work them into your story. Not every assassin has the good taste to pick a background of false faces. All right. Get your stuff in as soon as you can. Get a picture if possible. The police ought to unearth one. Good-by."

Beakman turned away from the phone after the instrument had clicked back into the receiver. His eyes were gleaming. So—the mill was grinding, then! Old Drumm murdered—the mysterious old Pheneas Drumm, who was reputed to be a miser and a millionaire, and who had lived mysteriously amid his painted masks. Old Drumm murdered——

But the eager light in Beakman's eyes gave place to a startled stare. He was no longer alone in the city room. During the moment his back was turned an intruder had entered.

Chapter III

"The Man is Here!"

INTRUDER is the word which occurred to Beakman, though scores of persons, even strangers, might have entered the office without intruding. But the young man who had made his appearance had brought with him a certain air of aloofness, and he was behaving in a manner so extraordinary that Beakman might have been excused for staring at him in amazement and with a puzzled question in his eyes.

Nevertheless, the city editor restrained himself. His first impulse had been to address sharp words to the youth who had appeared from nowhere, silently, unannounced, and who was now moving about the room in the aimless fashion of a sleep-walker. But if Beakman greatly enjoyed the fullest exercise of the "little brief authority" with which he was clothed, love of authority was not, after all, his ruling passion. The least discerning of the reporters who worked under him could have told you that by nature he was an eavesdropper, a spy, who was never so wholly alive as when he could furtively watch a human

being who was unaware of being observed. He would rather have peeped through a key-hole to see a petty thief at work than to have stood upon a mountain-top to witness the destruction of Pompeii. He would rather have crouched behind a half-closed door, listening to the harmless secrets of two humble creatures, than to have had an open seat in a forum within hearing of a Cicero or a Demosthenes.

So it was that he now stood just outside the telephone booth, with an air almost of suspended animation, gazing from under lowered brows at an exhibition of conduct which was, it must have been conceded, at least a little peculiar.

The young man who had entered the room had paused very casually at Beakman's desk, obviously taking note of the city map which was spread on the desk under a protecting sheet of beveled glass, and of the pigeon-holes over-filled with dusty memoranda. And then he had moved aimlessly along the line of reporters' desks, pausing almost imperceptibly at each, as if the abandoned notes strewn here and there, and the condition of the machines, and the adjustment of the lights, constituted for him a familiar and pleasing study.

Finally he moved toward the open window and stood looking at the obscure façades of the great office-buildings, and then down into the lighted street.

He could not have helped knowing that there had been someone in the telephone booth a moment ago; yet he was exasperatingly indifferent to other presences than his own. And it was certainly not to Beakman's liking to be ignored by any man, here in the room where his word was law, and where his authority was supreme.

He decided to say something severely cutting, something witheringly scornful. It was plain that the intruder was not a person of consequence. He was a slight youth, wearing a threadbare gray coat and a soft hat—also of a gray color—which had lost whatever of smartness it had originally possessed. A person of no consequence, certainly.

But Beakman found it extraordinarily difficult for once in his life to frame a neatly offensive or insulting remark—though many a reporter would have testified that such a predicament, on Beakman's part, was altogether unprecedented. There was, however, an expression of aloofness in the slender back of the intruder, and an air at once unconcerned and detached—a manner which was as a fortress which is not to be taken by direct attack, but only by maneuvering.

Then, very deliberately, the youth turned and stood face to face with the city editor.

His countenance, somehow, did not invite abuse or contempt. His manner was singularly tranquil, though his eyes were keen and search-

ing. He stood regarding Beakman in an oddly impersonal manner, as a veteran bank teller might regard a coin to determine its mintage or quality.

"The city editor?" he asked, drawing a few steps nearer without removing his eyes from Beakman's. He asked the question; yet Beakman did not hear it. He only saw the intruder's lips move, and noted the expression of courteous interrogation in his eyes.

"I am the city editor," he said in a blunt tone. He had guessed what the question was. What else could it have been? And his anger was stirred anew. For one of Beakman's secrets was that he was hard of hearing. He habitually shouted to all his reporters and by the suggestion of his own manner required them to speak to him in lifted voices. His men had all learned long ago that if they wished to draw upon themselves the wrath of the city editor they had only to address him in subdued tones. He added, with something more akin to his habitually offensive manner, "What do you want?"

The answer came, after a quietly thoughtful pause, "I was looking for work."

"We're full, here," said Beakman. He spoke angrily. Indeed, he was angry. He had heard what the other man said only by the utmost concentration of his faculties. The stranger had enunciated his words with almost meticulous precision, but he had spoken in a whisper; and the

city editor had been required to bend above his desk, as if in search of something, to bring his least defective ear closer to the whispering lips.

"Well—don't distress yourself," said the intruder mildly. "I didn't mean, necessarily, that I wanted to work here. I was just looking around." He continued to regard Beakman a little curiously.

Beakman had heard only a part of this utterance; and now he blurted out savagely—"Speak up, man! What's the matter with you? It won't hurt you to let yourself be heard, unless—unless you're a confederate, or something of the sort."

The intruder considered this. An expression of regret came into his eyes. "My voice," he said, still whispering, "it—it's a physical infirmity."

The manner rather than the words affected Beakman. It robbed him of a certain readiness. He dropped into his seat as if he were serving notice upon the other that the interview was at an end. He took a bundle of notes from a pigeonhole. "Well, we don't want men here who have physical infirmities," he said.

But still the intruder did not go. He rested an arm lightly on the top of the city editor's desk. He spoke again, in the same rather sinister whisper: "I gather from what your police reporter —from what Cook—tells you that there's been a murder committed."

Beakman could not have told why he felt singularly fascinated by this man's manner—why he should have wished so intensely to hear what he had to say. Now he looked up sharply. "How did you know it was Cook?" he demanded.

The other smiled faintly. "You called his name, two or three times, when you were at the phone."

Beakman flushed. Then, triumphantly, "Well, then, how did you know he was the police reporter?" he demanded.

"Oh, as to that—none but the police reporter would have called you up to turn in a police item." The smile on the stranger's lips was less like the ghost of a smile now. It was a very human smile.

Beakman flushed slightly and grunted; and then he shrank down in his chair and crossed his legs and pretended to give his undivided attention to the notes on the desk before him.

"And he was right—Cook, I mean—about its being a—a vendetta, as he quaintly expressed it," the whispering voice went on. "The murder, you know."

Beakman could not resist the temptation to lift his eyes. "Yes?" he asked. His tone was contemptuous.

"Yes. You see, there's nothing stirring at night on Fourth street. A burglar wouldn't have been interrupted or frightened away."

The city editor regarded him with insolence. "You know the city, then?" he asked.

"Not at all. I arrived from the east only an hour ago. I've never set foot on one of your streets before."

Beakman's expression changed from facile scorn to a strange, malignant intensity. He leaned forward and placed his clenched hand on the desk before him. "Then," he demanded, *"how did you know that the murder occurred on Fourth street?"*

He was utterly disconcerted by the simplicity of the reply. "I walked the streets an hour before I called here. I walked down Fourth street. I passed old Drumm's place—though I didn't know he was *old* Drumm. I saw his name above his door. I was attracted by a cabinet of false faces out in front. They seemed rather ghastly, staring out of the darkness on a deserted street. You see, there's no great mystery."

Again the city editor lowered his eyes. He was experiencing the antipathy of a jealous, tyrannical soul toward an alerter, more candid intelligence. Presently he heard a whispered word. It was the word "Good-night." And he looked up to find himself alone.

He sat cogitating in silence for only an instant; and then the newspaper man in him gained the ascendancy over the narrow creature who liked to spurn all men who were in a position

where they must sue. The fellow—this mysterious whisperer—had eyes in his head. He had learned how to observe. He had a brain which was quick to receive impressions. He might be a very good reporter indeed—and the *News* really needed good men.

He arose and strolled out into the hall, checking the impulse to hurry.

There had been no sound of the elevator ascending or descending; yet his late caller was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter IV

The Lost Tavern

THE reporters began to come in. The elevators began to be active, there were voices in the hall. The men paused briefly at Beakman's desk, each with a word or two of explanation, of inquiry. Then they passed on to their own desks and sat down before their typewriters. They adjusted their lights and their memoranda; they began to work. They were men of a certain unique type, all reflecting Beakman's ideals and taste. Those among them who were youthful—the majority—manifested a kind of perkiness, a notable self-satisfaction. They affected a degree of smartness in their attire. They were a class of men to whom the word *cynicism* was a delicious word. To be really cynical meant, to them, to be very superior. They greatly desired to be cynical, to be thought cynical. Their minds were so curiously formed that they regarded themselves as incomparably superior when they sat up nearly all night playing poker, or drinking, and then fell asleep in swivel chairs, with their feet thrust forward on their desks, and

spent the remainder of the night so instead of going home to their beds. In a majority of cases they were unfit men, untrained, all but worthless. They drew salaries of perhaps fifteen or eighteen dollars a week and were always in debt. Yet they regarded all other classes of young men as unfortunate and inferior. The few older men among them, some of whom were quite elderly, but who had been young and cynical in their day, were now particularly skeptical of the value and glory of cynicism. They were quiet men, inclined to be moody, yet not unkind. They gave advice and loaned money to the younger men, knowing that both were thrown away.

The clatter of typewriters arose in the local room. An atmosphere as of suppressed excitement permeated the place. Beakman seemed slowly to expand, to become more consciously autocratic. Occasionally he made his power felt by interrupting one of the reporters with a word of inquiry, of instruction. The office gradually assumed a bustling air. Galley-boys from the mechanical department appeared with proofs. Desk men with a nervous manner appeared and disappeared. Heads of other departments became occasionally visible: the telegraph editor, the markets editor, the railroad editor. Some required information from the city editor; others came in merely to chat a moment. The dramatic critic for the paper, just returned from a play-

house, came into the local room because his own typewriter, in some other part of the building, was out of order. His manner, as he sat at the desk of a reporter who was absent, was an odd compound of patronage and disdain and simple dubiousness arising from his inability to think of certain words he wanted to use. He had not yet decided whether he should write with withering scorn of the play he had witnessed, or whether he might not display his own cleverness to better advantage if he pointed out that the new piece was delightfully novel.

Suddenly a faint yet ominous rumbling sound could be heard. The walls and furniture of the office began to vibrate slightly. The presses down in the basement had been started. The early mail edition of the *News* was being printed.

The little sea of activities flowed and then it ebbed. One reporter after another turned in his "story." The battle had moved on, chiefly, to the mechanical departments. Here and there a reporter sprawled in his seat, yawning and occasionally glancing at the clock. The city editor seemed slowly to contract, to take down the pennons of battle, to put up his shutters for the night. He no longer seemed conscious of enviable position and power. For the moment he was simply an elderly man, weary and indifferent. Then, rousing himself for one final act of impressiveness, he arose and drew the top of his desk down

with a loud noise. He went to a locker against the wall and removed his hat. He looked at the clock, which recorded the hour of 12:30. And then, to the room in general he said: "All right, boys!"

He liked to demonstrate that among his various talents he could even be human—after the night's work was done. He had put a certain warmth into those words, "All right, boys!" Then he went out into the hall and stood with a certain Napoleonic air, waiting for the elevator. An air of loftiness began to return to him. He knew that the small group of men who would remain about the office for some three or four hours, in the event of some strange or important happening occurring after the regular edition went to press, were men upon whom he could rely fully. And he was satisfied that the *News,* on the morrow, would be a very good newspaper. The Drumm murder story would loom large on the first page, and the photograph of old Drumm, which Cook had obtained from the police, would probably be exclusive. The story had been well written, too—with a rare and effective touch given to the false faces amidst which old Drumm had been found.

The elevator descended to the first floor without stopping and with no passenger other than Beakman. The elevator boy opened the gate and the city editor passed out without saying good-

night. He passed through the lobby of the building and stepped out upon the pavement.

The street was now empty save for the few homeless mendicants who came and went a greater part of the night—or until the vigilance of the police was relaxed, and they could lie down on a doorstep or in an areaway and go to sleep. Beakman noted one or two of these human derelicts in a wholly detached manner. He was not interested in them. They were worthless even considered from the standpoint of news. When their time came to die their deaths were worth only a routine item.

For a moment he paused where he had emerged from the office lobby—paused undecidedly, as if he were vaguely conscious that in going out upon the highways he was leaving behind him his status as a despot, and entering realms where he should be required to conduct himself decently toward his fellow-creatures. And then he bethought him of Madam Joan's.

A few minutes later he had entered a dark thoroughfare and was making his way leisurely toward the city's Chinese colony. At a corner he encountered two police officers whom he accosted with spurious geniality—and they looked after him curiously as he continued on his way amid the shadows. It was not his intention to go quite into the Chinese colony—though already he was passing certain typical shops which pro-

claimed their Orientalism to more than one of the senses. They were wrapped in peculiar odors, somnolent and sinister, and there were strange exhibits in their windows: dried sea urchins and other exotic marine specimens, and strange herbs, and outlandish vessels and implements, and parcels in papers which suggested firecrackers—all constituting an exhibit savoring of foreign ships and far-away ports.

Beyond the first three or four of these shops Beakman came upon a large building of obviously Occidental aspects. The ground floor was occupied by plumbers' and steam-fitters' shops, all now dark and deserted. But in the midst of these shops there was an open doorway which admitted to a flight of stairs, and to the upper regions of the building, which was some four or five stories in height.

Beakman stopped and looked up the dark stairway. Something—the murmur of voices, it may be, or a gleam of light under the door at the top of the stairs—enabled him to come to a decision. After a casual glance up and down the street he began to climb the dark stairs.

It was evident that he was on no errand of espionage, for when the stairs creaked beneath his tread he paid no heed. Indeed, he hummed an air from one of the musical comedies of a recent year, and his eyes began to look upward expectantly, and his whole being to become more

alive, as he drew closer to the door before him. And at last he thrust the door open with a kind of theatrical gesture, and stood revealed on the threshold, looking about the pleasantly lighted interior. For a moment he stood so, and then he closed the door behind him.

He was in a dining-room, with a dozen small tables ranged before him. And there were perhaps a dozen persons within his range of vision, some still waiting to be served, while others had finished their supper and were remaining to talk and smoke.

The aspects of the room were all familiar to Beakman—or so he supposed them to be. Yet now he realized that an unfamiliar figure had taken its place in the picture. At one of the tables nearest to him a solitary diner sat in such a position that he was now gazing directly into the city editor's eyes.

Beakman's mind stumbled and groped for an instant. He stared at the unfamiliar diner, whom he had never seen in the dining-room of Madam Joan before during all the years in which he had patronized the place. And then his mind caught hold of certain clues. The stranger was the mysterious youth who had behaved so extraordinarily in the office of the *News* only an hour or so ago.

"Ah!" mused Beakman, "it's—it's Whispers!"

Chapter V

The Tavern's Guests

MADAM JOAN'S establishment was not quite beneath the admiration of persons in society, nor wholly above the suspicions of the police. On the second floor it was a restaurant catering to the needs of all classes of persons who had occasion to dine late at night. But on the third and fourth floors it was a place of mystery, catering to the pleasures of a class of individuals who, in the general and vague characterization of the police, were without visible means of support.

The rank and file of diners who patronized Madam Joan's entered the place by way of that flight of stairs which we have seen Beakman mount. That is to say, they entered by what was known as a side entrance. There was, however, another entrance on another street: an entrance duly lighted and ornamented, and boasting an elevator and a smart little office, and a discreet clerk.

From this second entrance one was lifted to the third floor, where there were many small dining rooms, or to the fourth floor, where one might

engage a room for the night. When it is added that a flight of stairs connected the dining room on the second floor, where the voice of the people was to be heard betimes, with the dining rooms on the third floor, where the Olympians foregathered, the architectural scheme of the establishment has been, perhaps, sufficiently outlined.

When Beakman had closed the door behind him and had recognized the youth who had appeared in the local room of the *News* that night, he took the first place he came to and sat down. His movements were deliberate and—at least to his own way of thinking—impressive. A group of reporters from the *Vidette*—the opposition morning journal—were seated at a round table at the other end of the room, and it was Beakman's instinct to be Napoleonic whenever he was in the presence of a reporter. Having seated himself, he permitted himself to indulge in a mood of pleasant fancy touching the character of Madam Joan's.

He thought it a good place to be in, after the stress of the day. On many a night, in the years which lay behind him, he had sat here—either in the public dining room or in one of the smaller private rooms overhead—and had talked the night out and the new day in, in an atmosphere which seemed to him wholly ideal. Many men from the morning journals met here after their papers had gone to press. There were two spe-

cial tables always in reserve for them at the far end of the dining room. And just a sufficient number of strangers, from semi-mendicants with barely the price of pie and coffee, to politicians entertaining friends from out of town, came into the place to stimulate curiosity and provide diversion and variety.

But Beakman liked best to permit his mind to dwell upon the private rooms on the floor above him. They were more exclusively Bohemian, less obviously matter-of-fact. Men and women from the theaters, the actors and actresses, were specially welcomed there. Chorus girls belonging to second-rate musical comedies found Madam Joan's accommodations within their means; and there they often found themselves in company with the faded stars of the stage: women of vanished youth and lost popularity who had dropped out of the theater's major affairs and found lodgment and a precarious living in nondescript traveling companies, and men who could don and doff a courtly dignity with surprising ease—men who had "appeared in support of Booth" in happier years, but who were now bringing their careers to a dreary close by obtaining minor parts in the most artificial type of melodramas and rural plays. When these were brought to the city for a week's stay they came to Madam Joan's—came with a childishly eager air, because it seemed to them almost like a restoration of the old glories.

Madam's rooms above boasted painted panels with heavy gilt lines framing them, and rather substantial mirrors, and hangings—which always seemed a trifle dusty—of a somberly rich material. There were larger tables for guests who came in groups; and smaller tables—you came upon them in all manner of unexpected nooks and corners—where couples could dine vis-à-vis: the man usually speaking in covered tones and smiling darkly and holding his eyes steadily upon the lady opposite him, while she looked timidly or forebodingly at her plate, according to an ancient tradition, though in truth it might be she who was the predatory one, and the man a creature of great timidity, ready to run at the first approach of danger.

Beakman had known these rooms since the days of his youth; and if they no longer seemed to him so genuinely romantic and splendid as they had formerly done, he was still susceptible to their influence. His boyhood had been spent in ignorance and poverty, and in the years of his maturity he was without the power to discriminate. Madam Joan's establishment still seemed to him a place of many elegancies. That the red wine which she served with her dinners was held in contempt by most of her patrons mattered not at all to him. He regarded the serving of the wine as a kind of ritual. He did not care that it was not fit to drink. And he knew no other place where

coffee was served in very little cups—black coffee —and where nearly all the dishes were mysteriously seasoned, possessing for him a special glamour which was bestowed upon them by their French names.

Now he sat just inside the door by which he had entered, his predilection for eavesdropping slowly mastering him. Through an open doorway near him he could hear a murmur of voices, spilling over from the floor above. He liked to fancy that he recognized this voice and that, and from time to time he smiled faintly. Undoubtedly he recognized the voice of Madam as she moved among her guests. It was her custom to descend to the public dining room occasionally and he counted upon the pleasure of seeing her before long. He imagined himself a great person in Madam's eyes. She graciously called him *monsieur*. She enunciated her words with a delicacy quite out of keeping with the coarseness of her features. She called him *monsieur* and smiled at him confidentially, as if she and he recognized the fact that the world was a place of manifold follies. It was in this way that she smiled at everyone, excepting those who came to ask favors or to collect bills. Toward such persons she had a very severe and coarse manner, which was unmistakably genuine.

However, it was evident that Madam was detained above stairs just at present, and Beakman withdrew his thoughts from her for the moment.

He took more definite note of his immediate surroundings. There were a good many diners within the radius of his glance. At practically all the tables one or more patrons sat. But they were all uninteresting. They were in Madam Joan's dining room not because of the traditions of the place, but for the purpose of gratifying their appetites cheaply and getting on their way. Indeed, Beakman was inclined to become pessimistic, and to lament that the old days were gone, and that the new order of things was painfully materialistic and hurried and mean.

He permitted his gaze to rest contemptuously upon the round table at the far end of the room, where a group of men from the *Vidette* were seated. It was a tacit law that no man from the *News* should intrude within that circle—that he should not take a place at that table, unless by special invitation. There was another table for the *News* men, similarly reserved. And in any case, Beakman would not have cared to join the group of men from the *Vidette*. In a number of cases they were men who had formerly taken orders from him—and who had quit his service with bitterness in their hearts toward him. It was his belief that he despised them all—though perhaps his strong disinclination to come within the circle of their conviviality was based upon the secret fact that they made him despise himself. They were a cheerful and gentlemanly lot. They

were intensely in earnest in trying to make the *Vidette* a financially successful newspaper, which it had not been for many years. They were better paid than men working in similar capacities for the *News*—though Beakman considered them pitiful fools because they chose to work on the *Vidette*, a newspaper of minor rank, rather than on the *News*, a journal for which the public entertained a wholesome fear and respect.

But Beakman's reflections were broken in upon in a manner which was by no means displeasing to him. There was a step on the stairs connecting the public dining room with the more exclusive regions above.

Was it Madam Joan, coming to smile upon him precisely as if she had directed that the choicest morsel in her establishment should be reserved for him? He listened closely. No, not Madam Joan, evidently. The step fell lightly and all but purposefully. It announced itself by its quality to be a man's step. And then the man appeared.

He stood in the doorway an instant in painful doubt; and then his glance was flashed almost fearfully across from him to the door opening from the stairway which ascended from the street —the door by which Beakman had entered. For this door had opened also and a second—or a simultaneous—new arrival had made his appearance. And for the briefest space of time the two

men, gazing across the intervening tables and diners, observed each other.

The first—or the man who had descended from the floor above—was a shy-appearing youth, bearing, despite his neat attire, the indelible stamp of a rustic. The second—or the man who had ascended from the street—was a typical specimen of the youth who has never known any but the city's ways, and the city's ways at their worst. The first was a man of physical delicacy, with soft, clear eyes. The second was a man of a naturally robust build, though he was now obviously the victim of a wasting and fatal malady, and his eyes were neither soft nor clear. They gleamed with a sinister light, and their glance shot here and there with an expression which suggested a declaration of war.

Beakman noted the two men, one after the other. And then he turned to the waitress who had at last made her services available. He was glancing at a menu-card, and then banteringly at the waitress—as men of a certain type seem to feel they are expected to do when in the presence of a woman who is required to serve them—when the two new arrivals took their places among the other diners.

Chapter VI

A Hand that Trembled

THE two new-comers who had appeared in the dining room moved forward among the tables, each with the evident wish to find a place to his liking. There were no tables unoccupied, so that neither could find a place where he might sit alone. And each rejected one table after another as if he hoped to find a more inviting spot a little further on. It came about by this process that both were presently near the middle of the room. Their eyes met; and each man turned about as if he felt a sort of discomfort in the proximity of the other. It appeared that both decided to take a seat anywhere, rather than to continue to be conspicuous by standing. Each man hung his hat on the rack nearest him; each turned away from this performance and laid a hand on the nearest available chair.

Oddly enough they had chosen the same table—the table occupied by the man whom Beakman had called Whispers. And so the three sat, an oddly assorted trio: the two new-comers busying themselves immediately with the bill of fare, while

the newspaper man, as he had represented himself to Beakman, regarded his new companions with a casual yet alert curiosity.

He came to a ready conclusion touching the pair. Both were uncomfortable—so much could be seen at a glance. One—the youth of a rustic type—was probably uneasy for no better reason than that he was among strangers. The other presented a more complex ground for speculation. He was a physical wreck, to begin with; and added to a malady which had rendered him emaciated and haggard, there was the result of what might have been an accident. His head, near the crown, had been freshly wounded. The scalp had been broken and it had been bleeding. The blood had been carefully washed away. So much was attested by the fact that the hair was still wet.

But in addition to the man's physical condition there was present a mental condition which was even more deeply disquieting. All his movements suggested rebellion, a savage hatred of the world, of life itself. His manner was that of a wolf which has come to its lair to defend itself against a too-numerous foe and to die snarling and maiming.

The waitress paused at their table and took their orders. The wolf-like stranger hurled his order at her viciously. Coffee and rolls. The other new-comer falteringly gave his order. He spoke with an effect of regretting his words—as

if he thought perhaps he might have found something cheaper or more appetizing on the bill of fare. The newspaper man, without seeming to take too pointed note of what transpired, continued to eat his food, which he was just finishing.

Then, in a casually pleasant way, he glanced directly at the stranger of the stricken body and the savage voice. "A bad bump," he said gently, indicating the fresh scalp wound.

He was disconcerted by the man's response: "What's it to you?"—snarled rather than spoken, and uttered to the accompaniment of a fierce gesture of an unshaven chin.

"Why, nothing special," was the soft rejoinder, "only I'm always sorry for another man's bad luck." He seemed to withdraw his attention and his interest then. He was really pondering upon the man's extraordinarily fierce manner. He was wondering what could have reduced any human being to such a condition of indiscriminate animosity. He appeared to direct his thoughts toward the third occupant of the table. He passed the water decanter, which had been beyond the man's reach. He finished his coffee and sat waiting for the waitress to bring his check. It would have seemed that he was no longer interested in anything that might transpire at the table at which he sat—yet he did not fail to note that when the timid stranger poured water from the decanter his hand trembled.

The waitress reappeared with coffee and rolls for the man of the extraordinary manner; then she hurried away to fill the remaining order, and as yet she had not given the newspaper man his check.

There was nothing for him to do but to wait as patiently as he might; and almost unconsciously his eyes wandered in the direction of the savage fellow who had repulsed him so vigorously. The man was eating his rolls with a famished air: thrusting them, piece by piece, into his coffee, and gulping them down as a famished dog might have done. He had eaten them in an incredibly short time; and then his eyes rested covetously upon a plate of bread which had been placed on the table for the newspaper man, and which he had not eaten.

The inference was not to be mistaken; and the newspaper man, with a kind of spontaneous good-will, leaned toward the other man. "Please help yourself to the bread," he said cordially. It seemed to him that the man was near the point of starvation. He moved the bread-plate to a new position. And then he observed a dish of rice pudding which had been meant for him, but which he had not cared for. He added, with a note of apology in his voice, "And if I might ask you to have the rice pudding—or better still, if you'll let me order for you some of the roast beef——"

The other man jerked his chin forward, his eyes glared fiercely. "What for?" he demanded.

"Why—I'm sure you'll not take offense, but I think you need it."

"That's no reason."

"Why, yes, I think it is. Isn't it?"

"If it was, there'd be no hungry men on the streets—and no ragged men, and no men to go cold."

"It's a reason just the same. What you mean is that some men don't recognize it."

The other man, with an air of letting a thin veil down over his belligerency, stopped to weigh the words; and then he put forth his hand as if experimentally and took bread from the plate which had been placed within his reach. The movement was cautious, even suspicious—as if he feared a trap had been laid for him. But when he found that he was really free to eat the bread which had been meant for another, he ate eagerly. He ate until the last crumb had disappeared. He ate the dish of rice pudding, too—drawing this toward him with an upward glance of an almost sullen rapacity.

"Come, what do you say to a good order of roast beef?"

"No."

"Well—I only wanted you to be sure you were welcome."

The strange creature made a noise with his

spoon against the saucer as he scraped together the last grains of rice. His actions, his manner, must have been painful to any sensitive man; but if the newspaper man felt any discomfort, he did not betray the fact. He came nearest to feeling discomfort when the other man, pushing the empty saucer away, looked up at him with a certain almost malicious curiosity.

"Funny guy!" he said. He still uttered his words rapidly, with an almost inhuman uncouthness.

"Do you think so?"

"Not comical, y'understand. I mean—wheels. Strangers in the attic."

The newspaper man considered this smilingly. "No," he said at length. "It's the other fellows, some of them, who have strangers in their attic. Mischievous strangers, sometimes. Counterfeiters. That sort of strangers."

He was amazed at the effect of his words. The man suddenly laughed: not heartily—the word would never have been suggested; but loudly, raucously, with a kind of malicious joy. And when he had had his laugh out he said with an air of deeply stirred interest, "You might be crazy, but you're no fool."

"I don't believe I'm crazy. But there—there was something I wanted to say to you. You'll not take offense? You ought to go around to the dispensary—the free city dispensary, I mean—and

have that bump of yours looked after. It looks rather ugly, you know. And it'll be no trouble to them to dress it: a little antiseptic, and a bit of absorbent cotton and tape—nothing more. It might save you a good deal of trouble."

Again the response was so unexpected as to be disconcerting: "You wouldn't tell a guy what your name is, would you?"

"Yes, I would. It's Estabrook—Robert Estabrook. Here it is." He produced a much-worn card-case and drew out a card which he passed across the table.

The derelict took it up and read slowly, "Robert Estabrook. *Boston Trans*—what's that?"

"Transcript. Boston Transcript."

"What's that mean?"

"That's the name of a paper I used to work on."

"Oh—you write stuff for the papers?"

"Sometimes."

The man grinned as if he had opened the door into a magic world. He uttered an oath, but he was still grinning. He was trying to express his wonder. His eyes, fixed upon vacancy, lighted strangely.

The waitress appeared now to serve the third member of the group, and the newspaper man—Estabrook, as his card had announced him—detained her with a quiet word. "Another order

of roast beef," she repeated automatically; and again she was gone.

The derelict shaped another thought. "The papers print a lot of guff—don't they!"

Estabrook was noting the changing aspect of the dining room. Nearly all the diners were leaving. He supposed that they might be employed in some sort of plant which operated by night. And when they were gone a changed atmosphere made itself felt. The place was now a place of leisure, of pleasant idling. A group of men seated at a round table at one end of the room seemed somehow to take possession of the whole room—though they had not stirred. They seemed to feel that antagonistic—or at least that alien—influences had been withdrawn. They began to chat more unreservedly, in a more intimate manner.

"Sometimes they do," replied Estabrook, bringing his eyes back to those of the derelict.

"What I mean is, it's a kind of skin game, like everything else—running a paper."

"Everything isn't a skin game," said Estabrook quietly. "Publishing a newspaper is sometimes a big job, a fine job. Almost the finest in the world."

The other man shook his head decisively. "Of course you wouldn't knock your own game," he said. "But the papers don't try for anything so hard as to please the rich and use the poor—

like everything else. You think about it. You know I'm right."

"Some newspapers," said Estabrook quietly.

The third diner now lifted his eyes timidly to Estabrook's. "Every business attracts some good people and some bad people," he ventured.

"That's the simple truth," said Estabrook.

But the derelict declared with a certain heat: "The good people get skinned, and the crooks gobble up everything."

The waitress returned presently with the second order of roast beef; and when Estabrook had indicated to her by a glance for whom it was intended, he gave his undivided attention for a moment to the group of men at the other end of the room—the men who idled around a circular table. One of these men now leaned forward that he might drop the ash from his cigarette into his coffee-cup; and resuming his reclining position, he said in a pensively drawling voice—as if in continuation of an idea previously put forward by some member of his group:

"You've got to feel sorry for any poor devil whose life is snuffed out as if it didn't amount to anything more than a match. And yet I suppose if you'd search the city over with a fine-tooth comb you'd not find a soul of less actual value to the community than that old skin-flint who has just gone to his acccount."

The words exerted a subtle influence upon the

very atmosphere of the room. An instant of unbroken silence ensued. All the men over at the round table were rapt in thought. Estabrook's interest in what had just been said was such that his head seemed to lift. His eyes narrowed. He seemed to be waiting intently to hear what would follow. And Beakman, who had been taking rather furtive notice of the man whom he had called Whispers, now regarded him narrowly—as if he suspected that any reference to the murder which had been committed that night must have for him a special significance. The timid youth at Estabrook's table had caught the words, too, and he seemed to listen with a kind of terror to hear what would follow. Only the derelict seemed unconcerned. He was attacking the food which had been placed before him. The edge of his hunger seemed quite as sharp as ever.

The man over at the round table continued:

"No, if I were asked to select a man in the whole of Missouri City who might be expected to slip over on the other side of the great divide without being missed or mourned, I'd unhesitatingly pronounce the name of old Pheneas Drumm."

The crash of a goblet was heard in the room. The timid youth at Estabrook's table, drinking a final draught of water, had seemed almost to collapse when the name of Pheneas Drumm was spoken. Now, with trembling fingers he was pick-

ing up bits of glass and placing them in a heap on the table cloth.

"It's nothing," said Estabrook soothingly—prompted to speak thus by the expression of dismay on the youth's face.

The famished man continued to eat as if nothing had happened. The men at the round table paid no heed to the crash of glass, beyond the most casual glances. But Beakman, with lowered brows, was staring at the man he had called Whispers, and noting an expression as of unholy triumph in his eyes.

Chapter VII

The Confederate

MADAM JOAN appeared in the doorway at that instant—like a stellar performer in a drama for whose entrance a situation of a certain psychological stress has been created. Some sort of mechanical musical instrument in the private rooms above had been set in motion and the sound of it had served to cover her footfall on the stairs.

She paused on the threshold an instant to insure a measure of impressiveness to her entrance, and then she advanced into the room.

Madam Joan's quality, her studiously affected pose, was along the line of homely comfort. She knew her limitations. She was too large for pretty coquetries—too large and by no means sufficiently good-looking. She was too robust for an effect of stateliness. A pensive aloofness on the one hand, and a comic familiarity on the other, she had rejected as a business policy of questionable value. There remained the note of wholesome comfort, and this she had learned to strike with unequivocal success.

She now paused at Estabrook's table. Her shrewd eye detected the fact that he was a stranger; it perceived something of his quality. "Monsieur has been properly served?" she inquired. As she spoke her glance rested in passing upon the derelict. It touched him like an acid and left him instantaneously when it became plain that he was not what Madam would have designated as gold. It took in the timid youth in a manner so casual that Estabrook knew that youth must be in some degree a regular patron of the place.

"Yes, thank you," he said.

She was not unmindful of the fact that he only whispered the words. She created subtly an effect of sympathy without seeming to note his vocal inadequacy. She frowned delicately at sight of the broken glass on the table. Then she moved on to where Beakman sat alone. "Ah, monsieur!" she said, as if her happiness had been completed by finding him there.

At that moment the timid youth at Estabrook's table arose and went to the cashier's desk, and then he left the room, going by way of the stairway which ascended to the floors above.

When Estabrook turned his attention to Madam Joan again she was standing over by the round table, distributing cheerful remarks among the half-dozen men who sat there. And finally she moved over to the cashier's desk with a manner

indicating that, after all, that was where her real business lay.

Estabrook left his table now. He spoke a parting word to the derelict: "Take your time; and —good-night." He picked up the two checks which lay near his plate and approached the cashier.

Madam left off asking the cashier questions as he drew near, and again she smiled at him. She noted the fact that he placed two checks on the desk and she understood perfectly, she thought, the presence of an alien type of diner in her room. "Monsieur is a Good Samaritan," she said. She liked Good Samaritans, because they were not ones to complain when they were overcharged.

He did not reply to this specifically. "You have a very pleasant dining room," he said. "And famous, too. I've heard of it long before I knew I should ever see it."

Her eyes really brightened. "*How* very nice!" she said. She spoke English in a manner which would have elicited no comment among her American patrons save only that she enunciated her words rather more precisely than they are commonly enunciated, and occasionally she placed her accents rather unexpectedly. "But that would apply to the rooms above—not to this one," she added. "Some evening Monsieur might visit one of the dining rooms *up*-stairs."

"Still it's very nice here. Those gentlemen at the round table——"

"From the *Vidette,*" she rather eagerly informed him.

"Ah, newspaper men."

"Yes. The one who is smiling—he is just lighting his cigarette—that is their chief, Monsieur Campbell. Many newspaper men are to be found here. The gentleman who sits alone—he seems to be dreaming—he is of the *News:* Monsieur Beakman. There are always a few."

"And the man who sat at my table—who has just gone up-stairs—is he a newspaper man also?"

Madam pondered. Her eyes were clouded, and then they beamed. "Oh, now I *un*derstand," she said. "He—poor gentleman—is without a post of any kind, it seems. He has been with me one month. He leaves to-morrow. He has found nothing to do. In so large a city—it seems sad."

He was on the point of asking her if her rooms were all engaged. Just at that moment he had decided that there might be a special advantage in his stopping for a week or so at least at Madam Joan's. But a waitress with a somewhat worried air approached before he could speak; and Madam, after a confidential word or two with the girl, hurried away to the regions above.

"That can be attended to later," mused Estabrook; and then he turned and leaned against the cashier's desk in a position which enabled him to

make a deliberate survey of the group of men from the *Vidette.* In a moment he had arrived at a decision. He sauntered across the room in a manner so casual as to suggest loitering; yet already he had fixed his eyes upon Campbell's face with a certain purposefulness. He paused at the table where the *Vidette* men sat; and when Campbell glanced at him inquiringly he said:

"Mr. Campbell, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"If my action isn't ill-timed . . . I think perhaps you'd be interested in learning who it was that slew old Pheneas Drumm?"

A polite laugh went round the table, led by Campbell. "I'd be very much interested indeed," said the *Vidette's* city editor.

"I'd like to undertake to locate the man for you—say within the next forty-eight hours or so."

Campbell's air of amusement was succeeded by one of frank amazement. He could not help being impressed by the whispering voice and by other forces and qualities which for the moment he could not at all define. "You're a newspaper man, perhaps?" he asked. And then noting that Beakman, at his distant table, was watching the little drama at the *Vidette* table with curious intensity, he added, "You might call at the *Vidette* office to-morrow, if you're applying for a place."

"Thank you," said Estabrook. "Good-night." He turned away promptly, while the men at the

table followed him with their glances, in which amusement was mingled with serious questioning.

He would have passed Beakman on his way out without accosting him. But Beakman willed it otherwise. He arose with an air of sarcastic patronage. "It seems to me," he said, "that you have found Madam Joan's pretty early in the game, considering that you are in the city to-night for the first time." He paused a moment and then added, as if explaining, "This dining room here is a sort of headquarters for newspaper men." He thought his words shrewdly disconcerting.

"I'd heard of Madam Joan's in Detroit, where I ran into a chap who had formerly worked on the *News* here," he replied.

Beakman flushed. Time and again he had thought to confuse this youth by the unexpectedness of his questions—and always he had been answered fully, yet with perfect simplicity. He began anew: "You were rather in a hurry to get away from me to-night," he said. "If you'd waited a minute or two I might have thought of something for you to do."

"I thank you," said Estabrook; "but I'm thinking of doing a little work for the *Vidette*. I've been speaking to Mr. Campbell; and it seems likely that I'll become his—what was the word you used to-night?—his confederate. Good-night."

He was destined to be halted once again. The derelict for whom he had paid for a meal was just leaving the dining room. As Estabrook passed the man stood in his way. "This card you gave me," he said. "It's a back number now, no? You don't work for the *Boston Transcript* no more?"

Estabrook took the card from his hand and considered it. "Yes, it's a back number now," he said.

"But if a guy wanted to see you—not to bum you for nothin', y'understand, but maybe——"

The newspaper man paused in indecision for just an instant; and then he produced a pencil. He crossed out the name of the *Boston Transcript* and wrote instead *The Missouri City Vidette*. He handed back the card. "I think that's going to be my address for a while," he said.

He felt that he could do no less for this poor devil. He had used the man. He had bought food for him so that he might remain longer at table, watching the timid youth whose hand trembled in a tell-tale manner. It is true that he had been genuinely moved by the spectacle of a man staring covetously at dry bread. He had been glad to lend him a hand. He knew what hunger was. Still, the man had served his purpose.

He left the dining-room now. Leisurely he climbed the stairs to Madam Joan's private dining-rooms.

Chapter VIII

The Two Journals

BEAKMAN also left Madam Joan's public dining-room a few minutes later. There was no one there for him to talk to. He had remained longer than was quite agreeable to him in the hope that some of the *News* men would drop in. But they had not done so. In truth, the men on the *News* preferred to gather at Madam Joan's when it was reasonably certain that the city editor would not be there. There was scarcely one of them who liked him personally. They all agreed that he was a very superior city editor, but they could not take kindly to his manner: to his moments of condescension, to his untimely assumption of authority, to his heavily gay spirit of banter. They manifested toward him a spirit of spurious cordiality when they ran into him, but if they saw him first they turned and went away.

He should have liked to ascend the stairs and mingle with Madam Joan's more romantic guests. But for once he felt impelled to act otherwise. The disconcerting youth with the whispering

voice had gone that way; and Beakman rather preferred not to encounter him again that night. And so he decided to assume the pose of one who has looked the world over and has found that there is nothing in it. He would go home and to bed.

When he had gone there was a sudden putting aside of certain restraints among the men at the *Vidette* table. Campbell, with a soberness almost amounting to gravity, spoke:

"It would seem like a coincidence, their being here together: Beakman and that mysterious chap looking for work."

One of the reporters, Ellison by name, replied: "It may be the beginning of one of Beakman's elephantine strategies."

"Elephantine?" echoed Bliss, another reporter.

"Yes," declared Ellison, "elephantine. There's nothing to Beakman, if that's what you mean. You can't argue that a man gets anywhere these days by being a crooked little bully. The *News* is an organ. It's got back of it the party that controls the town. When a *News* man goes out to get a story the door opens and what he wants is brought to him on a silver platter. A *Vidette* man, on the same mission, finds the door barred. When he's battered the door down he's got to go in and search among the secret places for what he wants. That's the difference."

Campbell seemed not to be paying heed to this.

He was pondering. "I don't think it was one of Beakman's strategies," he said. "I couldn't hear what the young fellow said to him—what a voice the poor chap's got, anyway! What could be the cause of it?"

No one had a reply to this; and after a moment's silence Bliss said, "I couldn't hear, either; but it was easy to be seen that Beakman hated the man."

Campbell spoke again, more eagerly: "You noticed that, did you? I thought the same. And yet he showed a sort of conciliatory manner——"

"Beakman—yes, he did," said Bliss. "I was just thinking he must have known the man before. Though he's never worked in Missouri City—the whispering chap, I mean—in the past fifteen years, to my positive knowledge. That is, if he's really a newspaper man."

Ellison, lighting a fresh cigarette, asked between puffs, "But wouldn't you have suspected him of being some sort of bug, rather than a newspaper man? Imagine any one of us saying we'd like to run down this Drumm case within twenty-four hours!"

There was an exchange of persiflage among the reporters in the group to which Campbell listened with good-humor before he said, "I think he's a newspaper man. I grant there was something a little extraordinary in the way he appeared here. But I'm rather hoping he'll be engaged to work

with us by this time to-morrow." Knowing that none of the men would like to ask if he meant to put the new-comer on the Drumm case, he added, "If we could beat the *News* in finding out what really happened around in old Drumm's shop it would give us a boost. If this chap proves to be genuine I think I'll call his hand. He said forty-eight hours. I'd be willing to give him forty-eight days. Everybody would like to know what's back of the Drumm tragedy. There was a kind of glamour about the old man. I never knew anything about him—but that's it. Nobody did, seemingly. Was he really fabulously wealthy, as rumor has it? And if so, where did he get his money? Did he steal an idol's eye?—and did he have an Indian vendetta concealed about his person? Was he alone in the world?—or was there a woman, or women, in the background? Was he an E. Phillips Oppenheim character, or just a lonely old dealer in masks, eking out a scanty livelihood, as the phrase-books have it? That's what the public would like to know. And if we could beat the *News* to it——"

He did not finish the sentence. It was the sort of sentence which implies more when it is left incomplete. But during the silence which ensued a kind of constraint took possession of every man at the table. They were all thinking how difficult it was to "beat the *News* to it" in anything. More depressing still, they were thinking how

pretense and bombast and assurance seemed to carry men further on the *News* than genuine merit carried other men on the *Vidette*. A good story seemed almost to lose virtue when it was printed in the *Vidette;* a poor story acquired merits which were not at all inherent, when it was printed in the *News*. The one paper had the crowd with it, the other had not.

And being for the most part rather young men, they hated the *News* for its undeserved success, and hated the men who owned it, who were greedy for profits for themselves, and coldly indifferent to the wellbeing of the men who served them.

It was Ellison who ended the almost clamorous silence and introduced again the quieter element of spoken words. Said he: "What they need is a bunch of good, old-fashioned Nihilists over on the *News:* a nice collection of chaps who would begin by dropping Beakman out of a thirteenth-story window. He's not a city editor. He's a czar."

The other men laughed at the absurdity of this. And then Campbell said, "You can't put too much blame on Beakman. He's the right man in the right place for the owners of the *News*. The reason the *News* is an evil force in the town is—well, the whole thing is a case of malignant second generation. The people who own the plant never had to earn a dollar in their lives. They had only to grow up and inherit: to inherit control of

a money-making newspaper. There's not a single first-class mind among the owners of the *News* to-day. But they've all learned to dance when the powers fiddle. They accept places on committees, their thumbs are up or down, according as the thumbs of the powers are up or down. They're eligible for places on all sorts of boards of management, when lay figures are needed. They have enough flesh on their bones to wear evening clothes well. They have mastered the game of propriety. But there—the tide will turn. We're getting out a better newspaper than the *News*. Everybody who knows admits it. You see, we've got to create the *Vidette* habit among the people. What I mean is that nine persons out of ten take a newspaper because they have become accustomed to it by one process or another. They may disagree with it, they may hate it—but they've had it so long they can't be happy without it. It's like having a scolding wife. Well, we've got to peg along until we get a sufficient number of persons to acquire the *Vidette* habit. Only, we want to be sure that it's a good habit. What we have to do is to have patience—and work like all out of doors. I'm sure of one thing: that merit tells in the end. If that isn't true, I want to keep on believing it, anyway. But it is true."

He arose with a whimsical light in his eyes. "In the meanwhile," he added, "I think a little

sleep will do me more good than knocking my neighbors. Good-night."

He went away from Madam Joan's in a mood which was a little closer to despondency than any he had experienced for many months. He went away without knowing that the tide was beginning to turn in his favor—in favor of the *Vidette*—that very night. But already, for the moment, he had forgotten all about the man whose speech was a soft succession of whispers.

Chapter IX

A New Lodger

WHEN Estabrook mounted the stairs leading to Madam Joan's upper dining-rooms he had made up his mind pretty definitely what he should be able to do, what he was going to do. He was going to work for the *Vidette*. That, for the present, was the main thing. His work would begin at about one o'clock in the afternoon. That was the hour at which work always began on a morning newspaper. He should want to get up any time between ten o'clock and noon. Those were the hours to which he had been accustomed during most of his experiences as a newspaper man. There was no need of his going to bed before two—and at present he felt no need of sleep or rest.

He looked at his watch. It was half past one. He might take another half hour to get his bearings, to acquire the sense of being settled again and at home.

He meant to do good work for the *Vidette*. He liked Campbell's manner and appearance. He liked the appearance of the other *Vidette*

men, too. And he knew that he had no use for Beakman or for Beakman's kind. The stage was properly set for lively competition, for spirited rivalry—and they were the wine which made newspaper work fascinating. The almost endless hours and the inadequate compensation—as it nearly always was—might be given a second place in his thoughts because of the stimulant which the work itself would provide. He needed to earn money too, of course. He had a special incentive to earn and save money. But he had learned from one drifting reporter or another, in his journeys about the country, that the *Vidette* paid better salaries than the *News*. And so he felt that fortune had favored him in that he had taken a liking to Campbell rather than to Beakman.

He meant to write the story of the Drumm murder for the *Vidette*. He had no doubt at all of his ability to discover all the facts. The key to the crime had already been placed in his hand. The youth with the trembling hands who had sat at his table—who had almost collapsed at the name of Pheneas Drumm—he was the key. Was he the actual slayer of the old man? It seemed improbable. But if not, he knew something about the crime. Almost certainly he knew a good deal about it. At least he was acquainted with facts, with circumstances, which would lead to the uncovering of other facts. His haunted eyes had

told a tale of guilt, of nothing less, when the men at the *Vidette* table had spoken casually of the crime. It was by no means impossible that the young fellow was himself the actual slayer. Estabrook knew that there is no rule governing deeds of violence. By their very nature they must transpire without reference to rules. Even the studiously planned crime has back of it those obscurities in human nature which set most rules at naught. Thus he concluded that even a timid-appearing rustic, with a gentle manner and a mild eye and a pleasing voice, might also be a member of the great army of Cains. An unwitting or an unpremeditating Cain, perhaps—though possibly a Cain from choice, capable of a weird ecstasy at the sight of his own hands dripping with red.

At the top of the stairway he hesitated with slightly quickened pulse. He seemed really to have intruded upon the privacy of a considerable number of persons. And though Estabrook had trained himself to go blithely enough among all classes and kinds of men—financiers, prelates, statesmen, criminals and mobs—he had never overcome his reluctance to intrude upon men and women at their meals.

He found himself in a small dining-room which boasted—not quite convincingly to his mind—of elegance. The air was heavy with Turkish tobacco smoke, through which he caught a waver-

ing impression of mirrors and gilded panels and gaudy hangings. Through two doorways he perceived other similar rooms; and beyond these there were still others—all presenting to his eye their tranquilly drifting wreaths of blue and brown smoke.

Without quite seeming to regard the persons occupying these rooms, he yet received an instantaneous impression of lustful eyes, of hair cynically untidy, of complexions too candidly brilliant; of dissipated, ogre-like men, and of women who had gone stale from running breathlessly down the streets of the world in their quest for joy.

No one heeded him, save that here and there a side-long glance, with an affectation of absent-mindedness, took him in as he passed. He went through one room after another with an air which might have seemed to convey a modest apology; and finally he came upon a sort of office. Also he came upon Madam Joan.

For the moment she was behind a desk, with the effect of being enthroned. She wore a priestess-like air, authoritative yet languid. Estabrook noted now how she was dressed; and it struck him that she possessed the genius of her race in being able to wear more than a little finery without seeming to be pretentiously dressed. It was as if she wore a gown which had evolved itself from her own characteristics, rather than a uniform of fashion. She smiled brightly, even bril-

liantly, when he approached her desk. "Ah, monsieur!" she exclaimed. She seemed to be simply amiable, though Estabrook knew that she was appraising him with practised shrewdness.

"I should have spoken to you before, when I had the chance," he said, "but you got away from me. I wanted to ask if you could let me have a room."

For an instant she seemed to look at nothing—as if this room and that were passing before her in review. Her eyes rested upon his again. "We might see," she said. She produced a bunch of keys and joined him on the outer side of the desk. "This way," she added.

She seemed to be inviting him to reveal himself a little more fully as they ascended yet another flight of stairs. They came within a region of restful shadows and a comparative silence—with a tangle of cheerful echoes for a background. When she glanced at him with a certain air of inquiry he said—

"I expect to go to work on the *Vidette* to-morrow—that is, to-day. It's not quite settled, but I hope it will be. And I should wish to be located near my work. Besides, you've a very cheerful place, Madam. I felt quite at home in your public dining-room. I met the *Vidette* men after you had gone. I had a word with Beakman, of the *News*, too. The atmosphere seemed entirely congenial."

"Ah!" she said cheerfully, as if she needed no further explanation. She singled out a key. "I think I have a room which would suit you very well. A trifle small, perhaps, but charmingly quiet."

She stopped and unlocked a door. She stepped inside the door; and in an instant a bright light flooded the room.

His vague fear of fustian and dust vanished. He had caught a glimpse of fresh white linen, of rounded pillows. There was furniture which struck him as being distinctly a man's furniture. And neither on walls nor table was there a trace of that ten-cent-store bric-a-brac which forever renders a room an alien place to men or women who must at times be birds of passage.

"Just the thing," he said emphatically. "I'd like to have it this week, at least—and perhaps permanently."

Madam Joan construed this as a gentlemanly way of arriving at the question of price. She considered an instant. She always had rooms to spare; and it was wise to have a few quite legitimate guests in her house. She named a price, by the week, which really surprised Estabrook.

"It's mine," he said emphatically. He flung his hat upon the nearest chair as if in token that he had taken possession. He added with a smile, "My trunk will not be here until I buy one—and so perhaps I'd better pay in advance."

But Madam lightly demurred. It would be quite sufficient if he stopped at his leisure, on some occasion when he was passing her desk. It was her theory that a wary landlady makes a wary guest—and she did not like to entertain wary guests. She was about to withdraw when Estabrook detained her with a question—

"And, Madam—the young man who sat at my table to-night—whom you spoke of as meaning to leave to-morrow——"

"Ah, a sad case. He wished earnestly to locate himself in the city, but it seems no one needs him."

But Estabrook shook his head decisively. "That couldn't be true," he declared. "Men are always needed, everywhere—the right kind of men. The trouble with most young chaps is that they don't know how to find a place, though there may be places all about them needing to be filled. You have to be a bit forward, you know—I mean, a man looking for a job. You almost have to say—'This is my place. I'm going to take it.' The big fellows like that. It makes them think: 'There's something to that boy. He's got the right stuff in him.' I'll tell you about this—what did you say his name was?"

With all her shrewdness Madam did not stop to realize that she had not really said what her guest's name was. "Cape," she replied. "Philip Cape."

"Well, when you see him again suggest to him that he might speak to me to his advantage. I'll be getting about a good bit. I might be able to help him, you know. And thank you for so comfortable a room, Madam. Good-night."

Chapter X

Cape Comes in

HE sat down in one of the two chairs the room contained and listened to Madam's retreating footsteps until they could be heard no more.

Almost unconsciously he had been taking in his surroundings detail by detail. The room in which he sat had an atmosphere of remoteness—as if it were a retreat, or a sort of pocket, rather than a stopping-place on a highway. That was his first impression. It might prove a very suitable room for confidences. It might tend to inspire them.

There was a tall, old-fashioned wardrobe over against the wall. He noted that it had two compartments, an upper and a lower one. The lower compartment, equipped with doors which were independent of the compartment above, was meant to hang clothes in. A very useful cabinet, he decided—for one who had clothes to hang in it. He smiled grimly as he thought how nearly his own store of clothing was represented by what he had on his back. The upper compartment, some two feet high and with a door of its own,

was meant to contain hats, perhaps, or underclothing. It was quite small.

His room looked out upon an elevator shaft. That was one of the details he noted. The building was equipped with elevator service, then. He had not suspected this when he had climbed the two stairways which ascended from the side entrance to the building. He drew the conclusion that there might be a more or less pretentious front entrance to Madam Joan's—a fact which he should have been able to guess without the hint of that elevator shaft. And he made a note of the fact that if occasion arose he might descend to the street without touching Madam's dining rooms, without seeing or being seen by Madam's guests—without being seen even by Madam herself.

He slowly relaxed more completely in his chair, as an invitation to slumber. But the need of slumber seemed still far from him. Instead of slumber, a period of wakeful dreaming came to him. He pictured the work which lay ahead of him, the probable aspects of the city in which he had come to labor. And presently his mind was dwelling curiously on the character and fate of poor old Pheneas Drumm. The old man would have taken his very informal ride to the morgue by this time. The body was lying in the morgue now, no doubt: lying in the most absolute of all democratic conditions, in company with the bodies of nameless

mendicants, and suicides drawn from the river, and worn-out creatures hauled to their marble slabs from cheap lodging houses, from vacant lots, from dark alleys and area-ways. The old dealer in masks would be keeping company with strange men to-night, but with all masks and masking he was done forever.

He shook off the dark mood which was creeping upon him. He thought of the newspapers which he hoped to become more deeply interested in—the one as the courier of his own ideas and craftsmanship, the other as a rival. The hour for their appearance on the street was approaching; and he wondered which of the two would tell the neater, completer tale of old Drumm's life and death. Whether for good or ill it was true that the greater part of the public always turned with a certain fascination to a murder tale and read it through though in adjacent columns there might be told the tale of kingdoms falling.

He pictured how the grisly chronicle would read. First there would be the naked announcement of the fact, falling like a bolt. Then would follow the details as to time and place and a kind of pen-portrait of the victim. Something would be said of his place in the community; and then, more than likely, there would be a little room given to theories—to the theories advanced by the police. These would be tediously stereotyped. "It was not known that he had any enemies"—

that was one of the sentences one might be sure to look for.

Estabrook forsook his picture of the morning newspapers for one which took its place in his mind with greater authenticity—the picture of the slayer. There lay the fact which alone possessed significance now—that the slayer was still unknown and at large. He had no doubt that the world's fiercest unrest must rage in the conscience of a man who has done an irrevocable, evil deed, who has placed upon himself the brand of Cain to wear until doomsday, who has placed a barrier between himself and all contented men until the end of time.

This thought had taken shape in his mind with amazing clarity when something caused him to start alertly. He had heard a faltering footstep somewhere on the carpeted corridor outside his room.

As if he had guessed whom the stealthy passer-by might be he banished from his face the somber expression which he knew must repose there. He donned an almost languid air: an air suggesting the hope that a visitor might call. He was glad he had not closed his door.

A young man passed within his range of vision; but before he passed he faltered almost imperceptibly, and then he went on. And then he returned and stood looking apologetically and rather appealingly into the cheerful room.

It was Cape, the young man of the dining room, the stranger of the trembling hands.

Estabrook did not stir for an instant; and then he brought his eyes to rest tranquilly on the face of the man outside his door. He did not speak; but his whole being expressed, subtly, an invitation.

"I saw your light," faltered Cape. "I just stopped a minute . . . I've not been able to sleep. A bad toothache——"

"Won't you come in?" Estabrook succeeded in putting a pleasantly casual note into his voice. A smile was taking form on his lips.

"If you don't mind . . ." The youth crossed the threshold and hesitated before he moved toward the unoccupied chair which Estabrook had indicated by a wave of his hand. Then, obviously ill at ease and with nothing to say, he sat down.

"I'm glad you stopped," said Estabrook. "I think I know how you feel—unsettled, I mean, and restless. I've often felt that way myself. I think Madam Joan told me you're a stranger in town—just as I am."

"Yes," replied the other, "I've been here only a month. I'm leaving to-morrow." He lapsed into an abstracted mood and sat gazing at the floor. Once he seemed to try to arouse himself, to say something; but after swallowing with difficulty and casting a restless, haunted glance at

Estabrook, he gave up the attempt. He seemed on the point of rising and going away.

But Estabrook had no intention of parting company with him so soon. He began to speak in a slowly reassuring manner. "Well, it's different with me," he said. "I've just about decided to stay awhile—though I arrived only a few hours ago. I'm thinking of going to work. After all, one town is pretty much like another. It depends mostly on yourself, you know." He produced a pack of cigarettes and lighted one with a lightly luxurious air. He passed the package to Cape. "Smoke?" he asked; and he perceived that the other man's fingers fumbled as they drew a cigarette from the pack.

"I know it depends upon yourself," agreed Cape, "but that means you must know how to do something. You've got to be able to fit into a place somewhere." He spoke falteringly, yet with a faintly dawning interest.

"Still, there's another way," declared Estabrook. "That's to make a place to suit yourself. After all, you'll never get very far by just fitting into places made by others." He gazed at the smoke curling from his cigarette and a whimsical smile lighted his face. "Do you know," he resumed, "one of my favorite dreams, when I'm in an idle mood, has to do with an entirely new kind of profession I'd like to invent—and I believe there'd be a fortune in it."

The other's interest was betrayed by a slight deepening of the color in his face, by a faint beam in his eyes.

"What should you think," resumed Estabrook, "of a shingle—like a doctor's or a lawyer's—bearing the words: 'Public Adviser'?"

"Why—what would it mean?"

"The meaning would be simple. You know there are medical advisers and legal advisers and spiritual advisers. Those fields are pretty full, and besides, they leave another field unoccupied. But you know everybody has occasional problems which are not legal or spiritual or physiological. You take the average man or woman—though perhaps you're not interested?"

"Yes—yes, I am."

"Very well. The average run of men or women may have good judgment most of the time about other people's affairs. But when they've got a problem of their own to solve they experience a strange mistrust of themselves. They have an idea that for the time being they're perhaps not seeing straight. They want to ask somebody's advice. It seems natural. Everything begins to seem obscure to them. You know what I mean? They lose the sense of relative values. They seem to get off their own base entirely. Well, then. What they need in such a situation is some unruffled person—some disinterested person, let us say—to see things for them—to point out the

simplest path for them to take. I'm not sure I'm making it plain, but haven't you been in a predicament before now when your faculties seemed to desert you and you felt all at sea?"

"It's perfectly plain," said Cape. He seemed afraid to lift his eyes for the moment lest they betray how deeply interested he was in the other man's suggestion.

"And so I would create the office of Public Adviser. Think how interesting it would be—and how helpful, too. Suppose we imagine a case. For the sake of illustration we will suppose that I am a Public Adviser. An old lady knocks at my door. She hopes that perhaps I may be able to help her. She tells me her story the best she knows how—though you understand I must read between the lines a good bit. It seems that her husband is dead and her children are all married. She is living alone. Her married daughter—Abigail, the younger one—wants her to give up her home and come to live with *her*. She doesn't know what to do. The daughter draws very alluring pictures. The mother shall have the best of everything if she will only give up her home. She is getting old and she ought not to live alone any longer. That's the way Abigail puts it. Now what's the other side? I obtain this by asking a few questions, and just by listening and encouraging the old lady to talk. It seems the married daughter—I'm still speaking of Abigail, under-

stand—has a child who's pretty badly spoiled. A little girl who slams doors and cries when she can't have her own way, and generally refuses to mind. And the husband—well, there's nothing really wrong with Arthur, though he is quite extravagant and doesn't provide Abigail with sufficient funds to run the house just as it should be run. Not really vicious, but a bit improvident. On the whole the home atmosphere is not quite harmonious. The old lady is a little afraid (she only whispers this) that perhaps Abigail and Arthur expect to ask her for a little money now and then, if she goes to live with them. The problem is: What shall the old lady do?"

Cape was staring at the newspaper man almost incredulously. It had seemed to him a species of wizardry, the verisimilitude of it all despite the readiness of invention. He asked, "What *did* she do?"

Estabrook smiled delightedly. "You mean to ask, What does she do? Well, if she accepts my advice she remains right where she is. You must look down into the depths of human nature. Here's the situation: She's lived in her own home forty—fifty—years. She's had all her pleasures and griefs there. She's part of it and it's part of her. Suppose she gives it up. She burns her bridges behind her. She gives the 'sofy'—you must pardon her for calling it the 'sofy'—away to the faithful old soul who's been coming in all

these years to help with the cleaning. She distributes the chairs among the neighbors, even giving one to Mrs. Carpenter, who was never known to give so much as a pleasant look to anybody. . . . But there, she goes to live with daughter Abigail. There's a joyous hubbub at first. Grandmother has come to live at our house! But ah, what is this we see in a few days? Little Clarice mustn't slam the door because it makes Grandma jump. So—little Clarice becomes enemy No. 1. She devises a phrase, to wit, Old Thing. A day or so later Grandmother ventures to expostulate with Arthur because he has invested in six silk shirts, forgetting that this was the week the landlord came. Arthur restricts himself to a single word: Indeed!—but he becomes enemy No. 2. And as for Abigail—well, Abigail has found that if she remains downtown shopping a little late, Grandmother will have dinner ready. It's great! And the same thing happens—dinner on the table—if she is tempted to drop in for the matinée. And Grandmother? You have guessed it. Grandmother gets to dreaming about the old nook in the baywindow, where the geranium was, and the tidies; and she remembers the old long silences which used to seem like a cross, and she wishes —oh! how she wishes!—that she might know them again. She becomes depressed. She isn't ill —oh, no; she just isn't feeling well. And then she catches cold, and somehow she hasn't the power to

resist she used to have; and—well, let's not put the old lady—really a good old lady, you know—under the daisies. But you see what I'm getting at."

Cape was smiling a little dreamily. "You're a queer chap!" he ventured.

Estabrook changed his position. "But now let's get back to the Public Adviser—to me, you know. When Grandmother comes to me before she has taken the fatal step I draw the picture for her somewhat as I've drawn it for you. Result: When daughter Abigail comes to hear her decision the old lady declares that it's lovely of Abigail and Arthur to want her, and that she should love to be close to little Clarice all the time, but that—well, she just couldn't bring herself to make the change. And now what picture does the future show? Once or twice a year mother has daughter and son-in-law home for a big dinner. She bakes a little cake for Clarice, and Clarice thinks she is a brick. Daughter and Arthur realize that the old lady will have a tidy sum to leave some day, and besides, they are truly fond of her, so long as they don't see too much of her. And so they try to be more thoughtful of her happiness than Sister Elinor—that's the elder sister. All very fine for mother. And she doesn't become depressed, but lives to a ripe old age. Rather sketchily done, but it will serve. What do you think of it?"

Cape only shook his head incredulously.

"You just don't see the possibilities," declared Estabrook. "The entire human race imagines itself in trouble half the time. There would be a thousand difficulties for a Public Adviser to straighten out—just by keeping his head when others had lost theirs. Just by exercising plain common sense. If a Public Adviser became more celebrated than the other Public Advisers in his town he'd have his hands filled with work all the time. Boys would come to him to learn whether they ought to learn to play the violin or take up brick-laying. How easy to supply the answer in that case! Girls would want to know whether nature meant them to be artists or wives. Could any right-minded individual fail to know precisely what to say? Men would come to know whether they should buy town-site lots in Florida. Would you know how to answer them? You know you would! And finally"—here he paused impressively—"men and women would seek the Public Adviser to confide in him their secret deeds, perhaps their evil deeds. There his great opportunities would lie! There would be his chance for something like mind-reading."

The other took him up sharply, almost resentfully: "I don't believe in mind-reading," he declared.

"Oh, then you've never studied the subject!" exclaimed Estabrook with assurance. "I don't mean

that you can read everything that's in a mind, word for word. But you can read enough to give you a clue. Let me prove it to you. You sat at the table with me at supper to-night. And you were deeply interested in a group of men who had been speaking about—what was it they mentioned? Oh, yes! They were saying something about the death of old Pheneas Drumm. Of course I couldn't say just what was in your mind. But I could tell that you were interested deeply in what they said."

"That would be reading the features," said Cape. "My face would have told you I was interested in what they said. I was simply wondering how they could get hold of information of that sort so soon."

"But reading the features and reading the mind are pretty much the same thing," declared Estabrook evenly. "Putting aside our argument for a moment, and answering your question—I suppose those chaps might have known members of the man Drumm's family. Or why shouldn't they have learned of his death from the police?"

"Oh—perhaps they did!" murmured Cape.

But Estabrook, leaning languidly forward to deposit the ashes from his cigarette on a tray, did not resume his upright posture for an instant. For the fraction of a second a keen light burned in his eyes. *His visitor knew at what hour old Drumm had met his death.*

Chapter XI

Estabrook Wonders

A DISTANT time-piece—the clock on the municipal building—struck the hour of two, and Cape arose almost guiltily. "I'm keeping you up," he said. "I'm afraid I'd forgotten myself."

"You needn't apologize," said Estabrook cordially. "I'm used to late hours. After all, it's a relative term—late hours. I shall not be going to work until after noon, and I'm used to sitting around at this hour, talking—when I can find a congenial victim."

Cape had moved toward the door; but it was evident that he still wished to say something, and after sorting over the words at his command, or the forms of speech, he ventured upon this:

"Just the same, you haven't touched upon the one difficult question—getting back to your Public Adviser idea. There's one flaw in your plan, and that's a fatal one."

"I wonder what?" asked Estabrook.

"How would people know it would be safe to confide in you? What would prevent your be-

traying them—or at least, why shouldn't they fear you might? You spoke of—of evil deeds. You'd be a stranger to most people. You don't suppose they'd place themselves in your hands, do you?"

The reply came briskly, cheerfully: "Oh—didn't I explain that? Why, you see, that would be my stock in trade. My reliability, I mean. If people didn't trust me I'd be a failure, of course. I'd have to establish a reputation for discretion. I'd get the public to believing that they would be as safe in my office as they'd be in the confessional. They *would* be. I'd never breathe a word of what I was told. I'd not have to, you know. The authorities couldn't prove that I knew anything: I mean, if I became adviser in a really serious case. My business would be secret, absolutely confidential. I should have made that plain to you in the beginning. I supposed you'd take that for granted."

And still Cape lingered. His gaze rested on the floor, his hand sought the door-casing. Again he seemed to be sorting over the words at his command—but this time he was delving deeper and his search involved a struggle. His color came and went. And at last he inquired in a shamefaced manner—

"And do you really believe you could give a fellow good advice—that you could actually point out the best thing for him to do—if he—if he'd gotten his affairs in a—a hopeless tangle?" He

lifted his eyes as if they were great weights and by a supreme effort held them upon Estabrook's.

The newspaper man leaned forward, intensely serious at last. "I'm sure I could!" he declared.

He had meant to speak on a lower, a more intense, key; but the result was only a hoarser whisper—a whisper which transformed the moment into an almost dramatic one. For an instant his caller seemed almost hypnotized; and then with an effort he regained self-control. "Well, good-night," he said. He was pondering darkly as he turned away.

Estabrook went to the door to bid him good-night. "And—you'll excuse me, won't you?—but don't permit yourself to believe you're beaten. Never do that! Say to yourself, every time you go to bed, 'To-morrow will be a new day. To-morrow my life shall begin at a new beginning.' And drop in to see me again—do! Perhaps I've talked a lot of nonsense to-night, but this isn't nonsense—it's true: If I can help you in any way I'm here to do it. A fellow always can help a little—any fellow, I mean—if he wants to. Good-night."

He stepped back into his room and closed the door at last. There was slight likelihood of his seeing anyone else that night. It was getting late, even from the standpoint of Madam Joan's patrons. The elevator had moved but infrequently during the past half-hour or so. The murmur of

voices throughout the house had subsided to a faint hum, and now it had died away entirely.

He stood in the middle of the floor for a moment, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his eyes gazing into vacancy. He was wondering what actual headway he had made with Cape—and he was wrestling also with a feeling which was beginning to possess him more and more strongly, yet which he had in no wise invited. It was the feeling that Cape was guiltless of the death of old Drumm. No matter how often he assured himself that the brand of Cain is infinite in its variety, that there are no definite rules by which it may be identified, he came back again and again to the feeling that Cape could not have done the deed. There was something about the youth—a kind of delicacy of manner, a shyness, an apologetic appeal for friendship in his glance—which placed him outside the realm of suspicion. It was only logic which testified against him. His manner and appearance, his voice—everything—proclaimed him innocent.

Estabrook's first aim had been to impress the youth favorably—to win his liking if he could. His second aim had been to suggest to him that he, Estabrook, would be an ideal person in whom to confide. And now he concluded that he had made but poor use of the hour which had been given him. For Cape—and here was the point which impressed him most deeply—Cape was

clearly not the sort of person one might take possession of by the affability and companionship of an hour. There were hidden depths in his nature. More plainly speaking, he possessed character. He might yield, inch by inch, to the demands of a friendly advance, but he would not lay bare his heart and soul at any and every invitation.

As he took his watch out and wound it he was still pondering. He had proposed to Campbell that he be permitted to turn in the complete story of the Drumm slaying within forty-eight hours. At the moment it had seemed to him a simple enough undertaking. Yet now he felt an unwonted dissatisfaction with himself, because of his rashness, his seeming boastfulness. He wished earnestly enough to go to work on the *Vidette.* He had sounded himself within the past hour, and he knew that he was in the right mood and the right place for the work which he liked above all other work to do. Yet there were obscure difficulties in his way.

Those difficulties were perhaps less obscure a few minutes later, when he lay in his bed in the dark. Almost automatically a phrase was running through his mind with the monotony of a coach's wheels along a track:

"A boy like that capable of murder? A boy like that capable of murder?" . . .

Chapter XII

In the Place of Masks

HE had scarcely closed his eyes—at least that was his impression—when he was awakened by the cries of newsboys down in the streets. A great flood of sunlight filled his room. He looked at his watch, which he had placed under his pillow. It was nearly ten o'clock.

He sprang from his bed with the eagerness of a little boy—life seemed to him so wonderful a thing, the world so full of delightful and unexplored places. He had said to Cape last night, "Say to yourself, every time you go to bed, 'To-morrow will be a new day. To-morrow my life shall begin at a new beginning.'" He had not spoken the words idly. They were a part of his own creed. And now he made haste to be ready for whatever the new day might bring him.

Locating the bathroom and solving the minor problems of its equipment; completing his toilet with no aids save that of a toothbrush (and reminding himself that he must provide a brush and comb and other things during the day)—these were experiences through which he had passed

many a time before; yet they retained a certain novelty and he enjoyed them. He whistled almost unremittingly as he moved to and fro, stopping only once to wonder if there might be other guests in the adjacent rooms who were yet asleep.

He was still whistling when he emerged from his room and made his way down two flights of stairs to the public dining room. He encountered no one, but the voids through which he passed were not dreary to him. An enchanted wood would scarcely have delighted him more. The halls and stairways seemed to him rather delightfully haunted.

Morning nearly always brought to him boundless energy and perfect definiteness of purpose. This morning was no exception to the rule. He was going to work for the *Vidette* in two or three hours, he assured himself. He was going to write the full story of the Drumm murder, perhaps the next day. And now he had no divided point of view, no conflicting sympathies. It occurred to him that he had gone to bed last night with a weakening sense of pity for young Cape—a muddlingly philosophic tendency to question, or even to excuse.

Now he knew perfectly well that as a reporter he was concerned with nothing whatever but primary facts. He must find out how a certain thing happened. He must turn in his facts with a completely impersonal and detached attitude toward

them. It was for those in authority over him to decide whether all the facts, or only a part of them, or none at all, should be printed. And it was for the courts to decide all questions touching judgment and punishment. As for the man Cape, if it proved that he was in fact the slayer of Pheneas Drumm, he was neither his betrayer nor his judge. He was simply a reporter. If it chanced that he had taken a liking to the man personally, he might seek to aid him in any way within his power—but only after he had written the whole truth about him, so far as he could ascertain the whole truth, and turned it in to his city editor.

He found the dining room empty save for one waitress who yawned when he asked for eggs and bacon. Then he seized upon copies of the *Vidette* and the *News* which he found on different tables, and sat down, his whole being eagerly alert.

The Drumm murder story had a first-page position in both papers. He read the *Vidette's* story first. It set forth the known facts, and to these there was added something more than a hint touching the eccentricities of the victim: his reputed wealth, the isolation of his life. A police officer had found him in his shop, dead, at about 11 o'clock. It was evident that he had been slain, perhaps an hour earlier. So far as the police could determine he had not been robbed. A gold watch of foreign workmanship, probably cher-

ished as a souvenir as well as a time-piece, had not been taken, and a wallet containing a considerable amount of money was found in the inside pocket of the woolen shop-jacket he wore. The police had instituted a search, the newspaper said, for relatives of the dead man, though so far as was known he had never referred to any relative and had never been visited by any.

That was all.

The account published in the *News* was entirely different in manner, though not different essentially in matter. It began with an attack on the police department—by inference at least—and pointed out the indications of another crime wave. It was a story in somewhat boisterous terms, sensational and silly, with a certain editorial quality mingling with the statement of facts. It hinted that no one need expect the police department to solve this latest mystery in the criminal annals of the town, since too many similar crimes had been committed of late, and in not a single instance had the perpetrators been brought to justice. It was suggested, however, that the department justify its existence by placing its hands on the murderer. And finally it hinted that a shake-up in the force might restore public confidence, in a measure, in the efficacy of the law.

He was glad to put aside the papers when the waitress came in with his breakfast. She placed his bacon and eggs and coffee before him with au-

tomatic movements and then went away patting her lips.

He had finished his breakfast and was turning away from the cashier's desk when Cape entered the dining room: Cape in a mood as despondent and furtive and aloof as at any moment during the night before.

Estabrook confronted him with a certain energy and cheerfulness. "We meet again!" he exclaimed with a smile. And then, as by an afterthought, he added, "If you're anywhere about this afternoon I may find time to look you up; and at any rate suppose we have dinner together this evening—say between six and seven. You can be here, can't you?" And he went away without giving Cape time to make any excuses.

He thought of his appointment with Campbell of the *Vidette;* but it was much too early to hope to find him at his desk now. Campbell wouldn't be down before twelve o'clock or so, and for perhaps an hour thereafter he would be busy with his assignment book and in getting his reporters away for their afternoon work. One o'clock would be a suitable hour at which to call.

In a moment he was on the street, strolling in what seemed an aimless manner—though it was only seemingly so. Already he was getting the feel of the city, as he would have said: he was acquiring a certain proprietorship in the streets, getting his bearings, finding his way about. He

was inviting a thousand impressions, making himself at home. The sunlight of the early May forenoon was glorious, even in a city which used soft coal almost exclusively in making its wheels revolve. He glanced into the complex tangle of faces which passed him with the almost expectant expression of one who says, "These are my fellows."

He seemed to move aimlessly; yet when he glanced up to read the name of the thoroughfare presently, and read the enameled letters, Fourth street, he realized that he had been subconsciously seeking this street since the moment he had emerged from Madam Joan's. He stood for an instant taking in the street. It was very far from being deserted now. An endless line of stake-wagons rumbled in either direction. There was a brisk procession of pedestrians on the sidewalk. There was also that indefinable city odor which was to him as the scent of heather is to a Highlander: a subtle olfactory murmur of great industries far and near.

He could scarcely have said that he was seeking the shop of the late Pheneas Drumm; yet when he stood presently before a locked door, with a man in the uniform of the city police discreetly keeping watch over it nearby, he knew that he had arrived at a destination which he had more or less definitely sought.

He lighted a cigarette and appraised the police

officer through the first puffs of smoke. It was wholly by chance, he decided, that the man in uniform seemed to be a creature of more than a little character and intelligence. Estabrook had had many sad experiences with police officers, whose ranks seemed to him to number, everywhere, far too large a proportion of low-minded hangers-on—men without a trace of civic decency or morality or pride, brutish fellows with only cunning enough to serve their superiors, or to deceive them.

But this man seemed to be an exception—and after all, there were always a good many exceptions—and Estabrook approached him casually, yet not without candor in his bearing. He noted that the officer was bestowing cynically indifferent glances upon an occasional morbid individual who lingered in passing before Drumm's shop and looked into the place where Death had walked only a little while before.

"Officer," he asked, "is there anything in the theory that a murderer can't help coming back, sooner or later, to view the scene of his crime?" He stood rather close to the man in uniform, so that his voice might be heard.

The officer had inclined his ear. The expression on his face was good-natured. Now he laughed pleasantly. "It wouldn't help much if he did," he declared, "because he'd be only one of a crowd as likely as not."

Estabrook was further reassured by the man's voice. "I'd like to look the shop over, if I might," he said. "I'm a reporter. I expect to follow up the Drumm story for the *Vidette.*"

The officer gave him a second glance; and then —"We'd better go around by the back way," he said. "The whole street would soon be pouring into the shop if we went in the front way."

He searched in his pocket for a key, and Estabrook caught step with him. They went around into the alley and a moment later the officer was unlocking a low door. He pushed the door open and indicated by a gesture that the newspaper man was to precede him into the shop.

Before he realized it Estabrook was standing in the room where the murder had occurred: was standing in close proximity to cases filled with mocking masks and festive costumes. Through the grimy front windows the traffic of the street could be seen moving almost noiselessly, with a kind of phantom-like lifelessness.

He turned to the officer, who was regarding him with the curious and respectful air of a man who is intelligent enough to read a newspaper, but who is not intelligent enough to know how little authority the printed words in a newspaper may sometimes carry. And Estabrook realized that the room meant to this guardian of the peace only a place containing a few pieces of furniture and a somewhat absurd stock, though to himself

it was a room where invisible spirits exerted an influence—where Pheneas Drumm, though dead, still spoke.

He stood for an instant, oppressed by the weight of certain solemn reflections; and then he was aroused by the officer, who had opened the door leading up into the storerooms.

"He came down this way," said the officer.

Estabrook turned to inspect the stairway. He stooped for evidences of footprints. They were there, though only faintly discernible, and there were many of them. No doubt a score of persons had ascended and descended the stairs since the murderer had come and gone. He turned to the officer. "Were the impressions taken?" he asked.

"Very likely. I only went on duty this morning."

The armored knight beside the doorway engaged Estabrook's attention. He stepped closer for a detailed inspection.

"A fool thing!" was the officer's comment.

"Yes," conceded the other. His back was toward the officer now; and he stooped lower to see why the knight's sword did not rest more snugly in its scabbard. Suddenly a beam of light flitted across his face and was gone. He turned about with an indifferent air. "Yes, a fool thing," he repeated. "Sword and all. It's made of pewter, I suppose."

He left the mailed knight as if the officer had said the last word relative to the shining figure. He paused for an examination of the table in the center of the room, under the suspended lamp with the green shade. There were two small drawers beneath the worn wooden top. They would have been invisible to one who did not search for them—in a measure secret drawers, though not really concealed, in the sense in which an officer or a house-breaker would have understood that word.

"They were empty," said the officer, perceiving that Estabrook had located the drawers. "And one of them was open."

The newspaper man opened one of them. It was a foot in width and perhaps twice that in depth. "What could it have been used for?" he asked.

"Perhaps to keep change in—or it may be records of some sort."

"Or a weapon?" suggested Estabrook. He peered more closely. A fine sifting of dark dust covered the bottom of the drawer.

"It was the other drawer that was found open," said the officer.

Estabrook opened the other drawer. The same impalpable coating was to be found on the bottom of this drawer also; but here there was a difference. The dust did not lie uniformly. A certain irregular area had been protected. Until a

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few days ago—perhaps only a few hours ago—an object had been lying here on the bottom of the drawer, so that the insidiously falling veil of the city's smoke could not reach the wood. And the outlines were unmistakable. They were those of a short-barreled revolver.

Estabrook closed the drawer slowly. He straightened up. "There was a chair near the table where the old man was found dead?", he asked.

"It was overturned——"

"And it lay here?" Estabrook pointed.

"Yes. And the body was lying there. It lay with the back toward the table and the overturned chair." The officer seemed to collect himself. "But how did you know there was a chair near the table?" he asked.

"I merely inquired. And no weapon was found in the room?"

"I think not—no, I'm sure of it."

Estabrook pondered. The dead shop-keeper had been sitting near the drawer in which a weapon lay. He had sprung from his chair—alarmed by the sound of intrusion, no doubt—and he had taken his weapon from the drawer. But clearly he had not had time to use it. So much seemed well within the range of probability. But what had become of the weapon?

He had no time to consider further when there was an interruption. The door by which he and

the officer had entered the shop—and which the officer had closed behind him—was opened without warning or apology and a man in civilian clothing entered the shop with an air of pushing himself forward. And in a voice which seemed, in that quiet place, offensively strident, he asked,

"Locking the stable door, now that the steed's gone?"

The officer's only reply was a word of explanation to Estabrook. "A *News* man," he said.

The man from the *News* began a rather pompous examination of the place. He disappeared almost immediately behind a group of cabinets, and the officer took advantage of his momentary absence to make a wry face at Estabrook—which was explained by a contemptuous jerk of his head toward the other reporter.

But Estabrook's examination had been completed. He stood inactive, waiting for the officer, who in turn was waiting for the *News* man. He glanced casually at the fantastic articles about him: the costumes of gay colors, the grotesque masks. But the thought in his mind was—"My friend Cape either has in his possession a pistol which he has acquired within the past twenty-four hours, or he has thrown it away. And in some degree at least he was acting in self-defense when he provided the old costumer with a new and permanent address."

Still he was waiting for the officer to leave the

shop and lock the door when he heard a cry of triumph from the invisible *News* man. He and the officer both moved around behind the row of cabinets.

The *News* man was standing before them with an air of exaggerated importance. "They are all locked," he said, "but one—and that one is empty." He flung a door open wide.

"It is certainly empty," assented Estabrook.

"And suppose it is?" inquired the officer.

"Nothing—except that it might afford a very satisfactory hiding-place for any man who had designs on old Drumm's life."

The suggestion seemed of slight interest to Estabrook; and after concluding that the man from the *News* might intend to remain in the shop for a considerable time, he moved toward the door. He turned long enough to say, "Much obliged, Officer," and then he was gone.

Chapter XIII

A Talk with Campbell

AFTER he had left the shop of the late Pheneas Drumm he spent the greater part of an hour in a sort of curiosity shop, which he entered quite idly, but in which he remained because the proprietor, with much time on his hands, had many things to say to him which he was glad to hear: gossipy details about leading personages of the city. The proprietor talked skilfully and without petty malice; and Estabrook knew very well that a newspaper man cannot know too much about the relative standing, the faults and foibles and *fortes* of the men and women whom, in a manner, he must learn how to serve.

And while the proprietor talked, needing only the encouragement of an occasional pointed question, Estabrook gazed more or less musingly at the stock in the shop. He remembered afterward that among the articles prominently displayed were a number of phonographs of an obsolete pattern—ancient machines with waxen cylinders. But why he should have noted these, or why he should have remembered them afterward, he could not have told.

As a matter of fact, he was giving only half his attention to the shop or to its proprietor or to what the latter was saying. His main interests were centered upon two points: the manner in which he might succeed in tracing the murder of old Drumm to his shy acquaintance at Madam Joan's, and his coming interview with Campbell of the *Vidette*.

It occurred to him that he had not outlined anything resembling a definite plan of action in relation to Cape; and also that it was by no means certain that Campbell would decide to employ him. But he soon set his mind at rest by assuring himself that he should be able to persuade Campbell to give him a trial, and that he should then have a real incentive to begin a systematic examination of Cape and his affairs.

He regretted that he had not thought of some means of persuading Cape not to leave town, as, it seemed, he was planning to do almost immediately. If it were possible, he must attend to that at dinner time. As yet it had not occurred to him that he need go beyond Cape himself to obtain proof of Cape's guilt. He need only win the young fellow's confidence. He realized quite fully that the hypothesis upon which he had based a conclusion would seem entirely absurd to most persons. Cape had seemed horrified when he had heard men who were strangers to him speak lightly of Drumm's death. He had seemed hor-

rified, and profoundly shaken. And later he had betrayed the fact that he knew at about what hour the old man had died, though at that moment none but the police and a few newspaper men knew of the old man's murder.

Nevertheless, it would have seemed absurd to most persons that in a city of half a million men and women, chance should have brought together the one man who had committed the crime, and the other man who aspired to solve the mystery of the crime before any others should be able to do so.

"It's only impressions I've got so far," mused Estabrook. "At least, it's mostly impressions. I've still got to get at the facts. But if all the facts are placed in my hands—and inside of a day or so, too—it won't be the most remarkable thing that's ever happened to me by any means."

He came upon a jeweler's clock, posted at a corner, and saw that the hour lacked but a few minutes to one o'clock. Whereupon he asked a passer-by where the *Vidette* building was to be found; and in another moment he was hurrying to keep his appointment with Campbell.

He felt, the instant he had entered the *Vidette's* local room, that he had found a place where he should be able to work with a will. The evidences of miserliness which he had noted over at the *News* office were absent here; and he sensed at once a spirit of cordiality and simplicity which

was entirely to his liking. Campbell was just dismissing the last of his reporters; and now he glanced up at Estabrook with a pleasant if somewhat whimsical "Well!"—and then leaned forward to draw a chair into companionable proximity to his own.

Estabrook sat down; but as he did so he continued to glance about the room, and finally, bringing his eyes back to Campbell's, he said, "A different sort of place altogether from the *News* office."

In response to Campbell's glance of inquiry he added, "I went up there last night—before I saw you at Madam Joan's. I thought I might apply for work there—but I changed my mind."

Campbell nodded. "They're very successful over at the *News*," he said, "but scarcely anything else."

Estabrook smiled. "I know that sort of newspaper office," he said. "I mean, the kind where they don't give vacations, and cut down the men's expense accounts, and have the habit of saying No to every man who asks for more money—and where they finally throw you out, old and penniless, as if they didn't acknowledge any responsibility for you at all, or any indebtedness to you. It's all based on what you might call money thinking—if that means anything."

Campbell was regarding his visitor musingly. If there had been a touch of banter in his greet-

ing at first, it was gone now. There was a certain veiled intensity in Estabrook's manner which the *Vidette* man could not help being impressed by. "It means a good deal to me," he said.

"Still," added Estabrook with a faint, apologetic flush, "a newspaper mustn't be too proud to be successful, you'll admit—I mean successful in a financial way."

Campbell's glance shifted to a paper weight on his desk. He rested his hand on the weight, turning it slowly round and round. "Not too proud to be financially successful by right methods," he amended.

"Yes, that—certainly."

"You're right, of course. That's what every newspaper should strive for."

"And yet," said Estabrook, "in that sense, the *Vidette* isn't a success."

The words were uttered in a manner which was unmistakably delicate and reticent; yet they caused Campbell to frown slightly and to regard his visitor with a certain resentment.

Estabrook hastened to add, "Relatively, I mean. You know facts get about among newspaper men. It's generally understood among the profession that the *News* here has to have adding machines to count its money, while the *Vidette*—doesn't need adding machines. What I mean is, you haven't got the crowd with you."

"The crowd?" echoed Campbell with a hint of disdain.

Estabrook's whispered words acquired a new intensity. "No man or organization is successful unless he or it can win the crowd. That's the thing that decides in a democratic country—the crowd. What we've got to believe is not that the crowd is contemptible, but that in the end its judgment is sound."

Campbell's tone was wholly tentative when he asked, "And what's your idea of the right way of attracting the crowd?"

The caller's eyes became brilliant with audacity as he replied, "The right way for the *Vidette* to attract the crowd is to publish good stuff that the *News* doesn't get—stuff that will interest even 'butchers and barbers and men named Muller,' as the German saying has it. Exclusive stories. Genuine human interest stories. I'd have one every day. At least two or three a week. I'd have the crowd talking on street-cars and on the streets—everywhere—about something they saw in the *Vidette*. That's all."

"Perfectly simple—yet extremely difficult, I fear."

"Not so very. I got on the trail of two stories last night that would set the town to buzzing, if they were printed."

Campbell stirred impatiently in his chair. It seemed to him that his visitor had thundered in

the index long enough. "Would you mind telling me what one of them is?" he asked.

"I want to tell you both of them. I walked down ten flights of stairs in the *News* building last night. I wanted to have a look at the building. All the offices were deserted. I didn't encounter a soul in hall or on stairway. There were just a few lights burning up and down the elevator shaft. The tenants of the building had gone home. On the fourth floor I ran into story No. 1. The—the plot, let me say, was outlined in attractive letters on a ground-glass door: *The Pensett County, Arkansas, Drainage Syndicate.* There were some other words painted in smaller letters. It's a stock concern. It offers for sale certain Arkansas lands which are to make poor purchasers rich when they are drained. The lands, I mean."

"Well?" inquired Campbell.

"An attractive scheme on the face of it. There are several hundreds of thousands of acres of the richest land in the world in Pensett county, Arkansas. Richer than the Nile valley in its palmiest day. *But.* Pensett county, Arkansas, was surveyed years ago by government experts. And they found that it lies many feet lower than its one logical drainage outlet, the Mississippi river and its tributaries. And it lies over a hundred miles from the river. Any system of drainage worth putting in would involve the construction

of immense elevated aqueducts and pumping stations costing millions. The experts reported that it would cost something over a thousand dollars per acre to drain the land. What I'm getting at is this: The Pensett County, Ark., Drainage Syndicate is a shameless fraud, working within the law. The fellows back of it will sell a good many thousands of dollars' worth of stock in their company to persons who will never get a cent from their investment. And when the syndicate has got its pockets stuffed it will disappear, leaving only a handsomely lettered ground-glass door."

"And yet," said Campbell, "we couldn't very well say that the company is engaged in a fraudulent enterprise."

"Right enough. But you could ascertain to your own satisfaction that the thing is a fraud. Get your correspondents down in the vicinity of Pensett county—if they are not all in bed with malaria—to look up the local records and supply you with the decision of the government surveyors. Then your story would assume this form: a description of the persons who are visiting the rooms of the concern in the *News* building. A picture of the lively scenes in the corridors. And a statement showing that the concern's land—if they've really gotten an option on any land—will cost $1000 per acre to drain, according to the records of the government. You needn't

state in your story that the prospective victims are probably expecting—have probably been led to expect—that the land will cost them only a few dollars per acre, after it's been drained. The conclusions you'd leave for the public to see for itself, though you wouldn't leave any room for your readers to remain in the dark, unless they preferred to do so."

Campbell closed his eyes for a brief moment, pondering deeply.

"It wouldn't be yellow journalism, to quote the old expression," said Estabrook, as if the other's silence implied a doubt as to the propriety of the course suggested. "It would be a simple case of serving the public—of giving it information of the sort which it has a right to expect you to give it. You'd be *serving*—and you'd be winning friends."

After a moment Campbell aroused himself from his pondering mood and assumed a brisk air. "You spoke of another story," he said.

"So I did. A better one than the first, I believe. Here are the facts: On the third floor of the *News* building—just a couple of yards beneath the land sharks—there is a particularly handsome office with this legend on the ground-glass door—*The Golden Era Free Transportation Company*. Here there is being conducted a fraud even more patent than that of the drainage outfit —and yet perhaps a little further within the law.

The Golden Era Free Transportation Company have a scheme which you can see through at a glance, yet it's the sort of thing which fascinates simple persons—the sort of individuals P. T. Barnum had in mind when he uttered his one famous saying. Here's *their* scheme. They advertise street-car tickets at six for a quarter, though everybody knows that the street-car company won't sell for less than five cents straight, even if you bought by the million."

"It's not free transportation, then?" inquired Campbell.

"The sixth ticket is free. They work their quaint little graft on the endless chain plan. We'll suppose that I go to them to claim their offer of six tickets for a quarter. First I pay my quarter. Then I consent to go out and find five persons who will accept their offer of six tickets for a quarter. When my five purchasers come in and give up a quarter apiece I get my six tickets. You see, the Golden Era people have kept their word so far. I've got six tickets for a quarter, though the transportation company doesn't sell them for a mill less than five cents apiece. But the problem has ceased to concern just me and the Golden Era people. It now has for its *dramatis personæ* five persons and the company. And these five persons undertake to do what I did. The next step—presto!—shows twenty-five persons involved. Do you follow the process?

The next step brings one hundred and twenty-five persons in. You see, you multiply by five each time. When you've multiplied only a few times more you've reached a number which is up in the millions. And then the scheme explodes because everybody is trying to sell and there is left nobody to buy. But before the outer ramifications are reached, the Golden Era people have several barrels full of funds, made up of two-bit pieces virtually stolen from women and children and simpletons. And between sundown and sunup the Golden Era organization has folded its tent and is preparing to begin operations in new and distant fields."

Campbell smiled faintly. "How did you gather all this amazing information," he asked, "just by seeing a legend on a door?"

"Because," replied Estabrook, "the same legend was just being scraped from a door in Detroit when I worked there not long ago, after the scheme had run its course, and a nameless throng of individuals had been duped."

"Very well," said Campbell briskly, "that's exclusive story No. 2. But you know you were speaking last night——"

"I was speaking of the running down of the Drumm mystery."

"Yes."

"Let us go into that, then. We'll call it exclusive story No. 3."

Chapter XIV

"The Drumm Case—Estabrook"

ESTABROOK assumed a certain precise air to which both body and mind contributed. He sat just so—drawn together as if for a special effort and leaning forward as if for a spring. His mental powers had been placed in order as documents are placed in order in pigeon-holes, each ready for immediate use in its own turn. Such was the impression he produced upon Campbell.

"My idea," he began, "is to turn in the Drumm story complete—the name of the slayer, the motive, etc.—within forty-eight hours after my first meeting with you last night. I may have some sort of preliminary story in time for the next issue of the *Vidette*, to-morrow morning. But my own idea is that it will be better to announce, to-morrow morning, that there are no new developments beyond the usual statements from the office of the chief of police. That would give greater force to the publication, the morning after, of the complete story—including the statement that the man who had committed the crime had been placed under arrest."

Campbell's expression was an odd combination of impatience and amazement. Presently he said, almost sharply—"Come, come! You must admit that that sounds scarcely—scarcely rational!"

Estabrook's manner was amiably deprecatory. "Maybe it does," he conceded. "Still, I'm proposing only what I honestly expect to do."

"Do you mean me to infer that you have knowledge at present of the slayer's name and whereabouts?"

"I think I may say that I have."

Campbell frowned. "Then I should say that it sounds very much like an instance of being accessory before the fact——"

Estabrook's eyes fairly danced. "I'd never seen the man until some two or three hours after the crime was committed. I had never known of his existence."

"I can only conclude, then, that he came upon you by chance, and confessed to you because you were the only person he could find who'd listen to him."

"N—o, that's scarcely the case."

"Yet he must have confessed to you?"

Estabrook pondered. "It's so difficult to reply to a question sometimes by a plain Yes or No—isnt it?" he said. And then, as if he were trying to escape from certain superficial handicaps, he broke out with—"If I shouldn't be taking too

much of your time I'd like to explain one or two of my theories to you."

Campbell leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head. "I've nothing to do for hours," he said, "except to remain here within reach of the telephone."

"Good! I'm glad of that! Well, then, to explain one of my theories: For a long time I've considered language—words—the cause of nearly all human ills. To illustrate: When A makes a statement to B the chances are that B takes it to mean something that A never had in mind at all. That's true, even if A and B are both fairly intelligent persons. The whole world goes about with its brain filled with misconceptions, misunderstandings. Wars and marriages and other fateful events come about as often as not because two individuals or two groups of individuals put different interpretations upon the same words. When I ask a man to lend me five dollars I don't listen to what he has to say. I watch the expression of his face. And I know immediately that I'm not going to get the five, though he's only just begun on a long exposition touching the ways of landlords, or doctors, or butchers and grocers. When I ask a boy if he's been stealing apples I go even further. I don't even look at the boy. I look at his mother. Her face declares, in a universal language, 'Ah—so the little thief's been at it again!'—though she may turn on me with the

declaration that little Benny never stole a thing in his life. When the financial magnate informs me that he got his start by saving the first dollar he ever earned, I allow the statement to pass; but I notice that when he buys apples at the fruit stand he keeps the largest one for himself. You see what I'm getting at. Well, the man who slew Pheneas Drumm *did* confess to me, though he doesn't know it."

"And you met him——"

"I met him at Madam Joan's. He's stopping at Madam Joan's at this moment."

Again Campbell seemed at the point of losing his patience completely. "But, my dear sir," he demanded, "how would you explain the man's being in a place like Madam Joan's—a place so obscurely located that it's known chiefly only to the initiated?"

Again Estabrook's eyes brightened. "That brings me to another one of my theories," he said. "Do you know, if I had a nice little brother whom I was particularly fond of, and he killed some helpless old man, what I'd advise him to do? I'd advise him to stop at the most prominent hotel in the largest city in the world, and make his appearance only on the most fashionable thoroughfares. The amateur criminal always seeks the obscurest place possible; the quietest hotel, the most deserted streets. The man's being

at Madam Joan's is the easiest thing of all to explain. What I *can't* understand——"

His expression became pensive and regretful for an instant as he thought of Cape's timidity and youth and his helpless, appealing manner.

"You were going to say——" prompted Campbell.

"Perhaps I ought not to go into that just now. After all, my chief purpose this afternoon was to convince you that I can find your man for you, if you care to try me."

"I'm going to," said Campbell. He added, as if in self-justification, "I need a good man. Quite apart from the Drumm mystery——"

When he paused Estabrook exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Ah, but we'll want to solve the Drumm mystery. We'll want to beat the *News* to it, too. It's our chance." He settled down in his chair, and his eyes, though they seemed to rest upon nothing, acquired the light of one who sees visions. Suddenly he pulled himself together. "I wish," he said, "you cared to know about my attitude toward a newspaper! I love to talk about it!"

Campbell smiled patiently. "I'd rather like to know about your attitude," he said; "that is," he added, "if you can spare the time——"

Estabrook flushed slightly, because the other man's final words had been uttered a little mockingly. "I've an engagement with my man for din-

ner this evening," he explained. "I can scarcely do anything with him before then." The flush slowly faded from his face, the light deepened in his eyes. "My attitude toward a newspaper," he continued, "is that it ought to be a champion, a crusader, a hero, a gladiator. That's the way it wins a following. That's the way it *deserves* one. But it must be genuine, you know. It mustn't espouse only the causes which are profitable. It must espouse every cause that is right. And in the long run the crowd will be with it. And mind you, I don't mean that it must always take sides arbitrarily with the people who are poor, with the people who do the manual tasks. When such persons are in the wrong it must show them where they are wrong. That's the only real way to take sides with them. But it must show the people who are simple and unlearned that it's out to slay dragons every time they lift their heads."

Campbell smiled patiently.

"That sounds extravagant, I know. Let me simplify it. I spoke to you of the Golden Era Free Transportation Company, and of that fake drainage scheme. That's the sort of dragons I mean—the cunning creatures who try to rob the unsophisticated of their pennies and dollars. They're the real, every-day dragons. But here we have St. George in the offing! The real newspaper cries out, 'You shall not rob these people!' Don't you see how surely the crowd would come

to understand that? That's the real province of a newspaper. Suppose you publish a learned article on the science of government—a fine abstraction. What's the result? Fifty of your readers will nod their approval and say, 'The *Vidette* is an excellent newspaper.' Yet forty of the fifty are too busy to read the article, or they know what's in it and agree with it without reading. Nine out of the fifty will read it without grasping it. Only one will really appreciate it and perhaps cut it out and file it. But when you slay a dragon—why, then, man, the crowd comes on the run. There are thousands of persons interested in the fake schemes I've told you about. They're in them themselves, or their neighbors are. If you kill a dragon thousands of men say, 'It's in the *Vidette*.' And if you keep on killing dragons you soon find that you have to increase your supply of print paper, and that you haven't any return copies on your hands."

Campbell's smile was becoming a little less patronizing. "And the Drumm mystery," he suggested, "how does your theory of dragon-slaying apply to that?"

For an instant Estabrook seemed at a loss for words. Then with new energy he said, "Ah, that touches another theory of mine—the Drumm case. Let me go into that. You know there are only two things that a newspaper must do: it must inform and it must entertain. It must publish facts

and stories. And of the very few universal themes for stories, one of the most thrilling is the theme of bloodshed."

In response to Campbell's dubious frown he continued, "I'm not going into the question of ethics. I'm speaking only of conditions. Warfare always provides the most absorbing story that can go into a newspaper, and all the other chronicles of bloodshed, down to a simple case of fisticuffs on the public streets, are proportionately interesting. And by the way, you'll notice that the newspapers which disdain to handle stories of bloodshed in which only two are involved will fall into line readily enough when there's a war—though the two things are on precisely the same plane in point of ethics. People want to know about deeds of violence. You'll note that the wise heads that planned the Bible didn't wait long to introduce Cain and Abel—they put them in long before they mentioned Solomon or Job or Jesus. And the Bible, you know, has been a pretty successful book, commercially as well as otherwise."

At this point Campbell leaned back and laughed so heartily and unrestrainedly that his caller was startled.

"And yet it's true?" remonstrated Estabrook.

The amusement died slowly from Campbell's eyes. An expression almost of bewilderment followed. He could not understand why he should

have been so strangely impressed by this man who spoke in exaggerations, if not actually in sophistries. It was the voice, perhaps, which never shook off the huskiness which clung to it—which went on whispering as if it were conveying wholly strange and unknown yet greatly important matters. Yes, it must be the whispering voice; and perhaps, to a lesser degree, the keen eyes and the seeming intensity of conviction.

"It *is* true," continued Estabrook. "Take the case of our friend Drumm. If he had contributed half a million to the cause of maintaining universal peace you'd have given him ten lines on an inside page of the *Vidette*. But because he shed his blood involuntarily you gave him this." And he put forth his hand and laid it palm downward on a full column story on the first page of the *Vidette's* Sunrise Edition.

"Let's get at the psychology of it," he added, "if you don't mind my using an overworked word. A deed of violence usually implies a man-hunt. And when you go on a man-hunt you touch every man in your community in two sensitive spots. First, you touch his sense of justice, of fairness. The murderer—if it be the case of a murder—must be taken because of the evil deed he has done. But mixed with this sentiment, so subtly that you can't tell where one begins and the other ends, is the love of the chase. Here's a human being in hiding. He is matching his wits against

yours. You are keen to find him. You are eager to be in at the finish. At such a time every man is part of a mob—though he may not stir out of his own house. His interests, to some extent even his passions, are bound up in those of a great number of men. The slaying of an individual has in it, in little, all the elements of a great tragedy. And in the case of Drumm there are added certain obscurities which increase the dramatic value of the situation. The mystery surrounding him; the fact that thousands knew him superficially without knowing him really; the absence of any obvious motive on the part of his slayer—all these circumstances help. And it's the *Vidette's* story. The *News* has put itself out of court by its silly attack on the police force. That's stale stuff in no matter what city you happen to be. A police force has got little or nothing to do with crime. It's all right for cases of disturbances of the peace, to arrest men for beating their wives or children or dumb beasts. But when it comes to criminals, a police officer is almost as helpless as a town marshal would be against an invading army. Public sentiment makes him helpless—even if he had any real ability. If he arrests a real criminal—unless the latter is a stranger in the city—there's a bondsman for the criminal before he is taken as far as the nearest police station. And if his case is taken into court it develops that the prosecuting witness has been

warned that if he offers testimony against him his property and the wellbeing of himself and his family will be placed in jeopardy. It's no use abusing the police. That's not the newspaper's job. It's to ferret out facts and publish them. And my job, with your permission, will be to lay bare all the facts touching the death of that old man who rented masks, but who kept the best mask he had for his own personal use."

Campbell was smiling again—but his smile now was one of a certain deep satisfaction. He partly arose and took down an assignment book from the top of his desk. In it he made an entry of four words:

The Drumm case—Estabrook.

He held the book so that Estabrook could read. Then he said briskly, yet cordially—"And good luck to you."

Chapter XV

The Spider and the Fly

ESTABROOK entered Madam Joan's public dining-room a little after six o'clock. The sun had been shining in his eyes when he left the street; but now he found himself in a region of restful shadows, and a second glance sufficed to inform him that for the moment he was the only patron in the room. He chose a seat deliberately and unfolded the evening paper which he had been carrying in his coat pocket; and when a waitress appeared presently he explained that he would not give his order until he had been joined by a friend whom he was expecting.

For ten minutes or more he remained alone; and then he found his eyes being drawn away from his newspaper by an uncomfortable feeling of being observed. He glanced sharply toward the street entrance. Just inside the door stood Beakman and another man, both regarding him as if with a certain derisive amusement.

He had scarcely time to focus his glance upon them when they disappeared by way of the doorway which led to the private dining-rooms above.

But during that fleeting moment he recognized Beakman's companion as the reporter whom he had encountered earlier in the day in the shop of the late Pheneas Drumm.

He resumed the reading of his newspaper, conscious of a slight irritation because of the furtive and contemptuous manner in which the two *News* men had regarded him. He felt vaguely menaced because of the necessity of carrying forward his plans in relation to Cape here in a stronghold of reporters, including the man who was, presumably, looking after the Drumm case for the *News*. Well, he should have to be doubly wary—that was all.

Then there was another interruption; and this time it was Cape.

He was thrilled by the expression on Cape's face: an expression at first forlorn—before the eyes had sought out the solitary occupant of the room—and then beamingly glad, like the face of a child. He put aside his paper with an air of relief. "Ah!" he exclaimed cordially.

Cape approached and took the seat opposite him, his face flushed slightly with pleasure, his eyes appealingly bright. "You *did* remember!" he said.

"My engagement with you? Oh, yes! I shouldn't have forgotten that."

"I was thinking—it doesn't mean much to you, you know; that is, compared with what it means to me. You're the first soul I've met in this big

town who seemed to know whether I was a living human being, or just a—a mechanical figure of some kind." He adjusted his chair nervously, and Estabrook noted that the expression of forlornness crept back into his eyes slowly, as an indelible stain will come back.

"Any progress to report?" inquired the newspaper man as he took up the bill of fare. He spoke casually yet kindly.

"You mean, have I run across anything? No —no, I scarcely expect to do that." He paused broodingly an instant and then continued with an effort, "You'll scarcely realize how helpless I feel. I can't seem even to look for work, or ask for it, except in such a backward way that nobody would be willing to listen to me. And yet I feel that if I once had a chance—at anything, really— I'd wish to work feverishly, so that I could forget —forget what it seems like not to have a place anywhere."

Estabrook spoke decisively. "I'm going to help you to get over that. You've been bluffed, that's all. I've seen young fellows like that lots of times. My idea is that we must put you on your feet squarely—until you get to traveling right. That's all you need."

Cape swallowed with difficulty. He could not speak immediately; but presently he said, "Yes, that's what I need—to get started right."

"And you're going to fight it out right here,"

continued Estabrook. "You had an idea of going away, I think. But it doesn't do to run away from an enemy of any sort. You must always face him. And enemies . . . they're a strange lot. Sometimes it's the little ones who ruin us, while the big ones are the making of us."

He gave his attention to the waitress for a moment; and when she had gone away he sat thoughtfully regarding his companion, ready to smile whenever he caught his eye.

"I—don't want to go away, now," said Cape. "You see, there doesn't seem anywhere to go. I've never lived anywhere but in one little town, and I —I couldn't go back there. I can't explain——"

"You needn't. Even if there are special reasons, I know enough about the general reasons. To go back to a little town, unsuccessful; that would seem like permanent defeat. You'd be fatally handicapped. No, you ought to stay right here. And you know—I'm sure you'll not mind my speaking of it—in the matter of a little financial help, like the squaring of Madam Joan, you're to look to me for the time being. There—it's nothing. It's settled. And it'll not be for long."

Just the suspicion of a quiver ran across Cape's face. "I'm not saying I'll accept," he said when he could command his voice; "but I do say that if I should accept it will be a debt that will be repaid."

"Of course it will!" declared Estabrook, and

then another silence fell between them. It remained unbroken when the waitress returned with the food they had ordered; and then Estabrook said cheerfully, "Now, let's enjoy our bite, and if there are any dark closets to open we'll open them afterward."

He spoke lightly, of pleasant things only, during the meal; and even when they had come to their coffee he did not seem disposed to sound out any hidden ground. It was Cape who said at last, with a diffidence which was not to be overcome at first, "You spoke a little while ago about getting a right start. But you know that's an awful hard matter sometimes. It was my getting a wrong start—at the very beginning, almost——"

When he paused, groping for words, Estabrook put in easily, "Suppose you tell me about that." He permitted his mind to wander a moment while he glanced casually about the room. He hoped there might be no interruption. He hoped above everything else that Beakman and his companion might not return by way of the public dining-room. He thought it improbable that they would do so; and as for other interruptions, he concluded that he had little to fear on that score for perhaps an hour or so. Madam Joan's patrons as a class were late-comers. He brought his glance invitingly back to Cape's eyes.

"I had a mind to do it last night," said Cape.

"I mean, when you were talking about—what did you call it?—about a Public Adviser."

Estabrook laughed. "I'm afraid I talked rather whimsically about that," he said.

But Cape became grave. "It sounded so reasonable," he declared; "and the way you pictured the old lady who really didn't exist——"

"Ah, but she does exist! There are thousands of her!"

"Yes, in that way. But I had a mind to ask to be your first client—just in a confidential way, you know."

"Well——" said Estabrook.

"You see, I've gotten myself into a rather peculiar predicament. There doesn't seem any place for me to go to. No place at all."

He paused so long after that statement that Estabrook prompted him gently. "You mustn't let that upset you, you know. You're at an age when that sort of predicament is common. You've come to a point where you must make a place for yourself. That's the whole truth."

"But, you see, my case is a little different from the ordinary. I don't know how to do anything. I mean, I've no special skill. I've got no relatives or friends to turn to. I'm almost more alone than anyone else I ever heard of."

"Then you must make connections of some sort: business and social. It's easy, at your age."

But Cape only frowned in perplexity, as if im-

passable barriers arose between him and a frank understanding with his companion. Presently he tried again: "You see, I didn't get the right start as a boy. It was this way: I lived in a little town, and I grew up with the belief that I'd have money some day. A great deal of it. My father died before I knew him. But my mother was supposed to have a really large estate. I never knew what it consisted of—her estate. For a long time I never gave a thought to it. I only knew that we lived very well and that there never seemed any cause for worry. There was an uncle—my mother's brother. And he had full control of my mother's affairs after my father's death. She was that kind of a woman. Yielding and impractical. You see, her estate and my uncle's were all one. I always understood vaguely that there were reasons why it couldn't be divided. Not for a long time, at any rate. And then my uncle became interested in some project which required him to locate somewhere at a distance. And he went away."

He paused in perplexity, and Estabrook got the impression that he was trying to decide how much he ought to hold back, and how much he might discreetly disclose.

"I remember," continued Cape, "that papers for my mother to sign came once or twice, with very explicit directions as to where she was to sign; and she signed them and sent them away. And it seemed that her income continued just as

usual for a while after that. And then something happened. My first knowledge that something had gone wrong was that my uncle couldn't be located. My mother's letters to him were returned. And I gathered that she was trying to locate him and that she was tremendously worried. She sought advice—from a lawyer, finally—and they were all trying to find out what had become of my uncle. And then it developed that my mother's income had been cut off. We hadn't anything at all.

"She thought it was simply a bad period which we'd have to tide over somehow. She kept expecting to hear from her brother. It was a long time before she could be made to accept the truth. She borrowed money here and there, and ran bills. And I remember how indignant she was—and I, too—when she found that it had become very difficult to borrow money, or to have her credit extended at the stores. Her pride was wounded, and she got so that she wouldn't ask favors of anyone. She raised money on our home, and paid off all the debts. She had a small balance left, and she took a good deal of pride in paying for everything she needed—and perhaps for a good many things we didn't really need. She used to tell me how she would make certain individuals feel ashamed of themselves when our affairs were straightened out again, and the debt on the house

was paid off, and her income was again at her disposal.

"I think she was the very last person in town to realize that old—that my uncle was a thief and that he had ruined her. I've no doubt that a good many persons had always known him better than she did, really. But she seemed to realize the truth at last—though I never knew exactly when or how this came about. You see, she wouldn't allow me to change my way of living or thinking for a long time. There was a private academy in the town and I kept attending this long after our means justified my doing so. I was learning ornamental things, chiefly. My mother couldn't think in any terms other than those of class distinctions. I was to be a gentleman and I was never to engage in any but gentlemanly occupations. That was my own idea, too, though I didn't really understand what was meant by it. I doubt if she did either. But for a long time we went on living in the old atmosphere—our house open to everyone, with someone always at our table, without any ceremony at all, and a certain air of leisure and elegance about the place—as if we only had to rub a lamp to get more money. Have I made it plain?"

"Very," said Estabrook.

"Then at last, as I said, she realized the truth. And it had the most distressing effect upon her. Of course she wasn't a woman of practical sense

—though I don't mean she wasn't a dear and lovely lady. She was all of that. But you couldn't have expected her to readjust herself any more than you could expect a wisteria vine to become a grape, or a fruit-bearing tree. She began to muse in a dark sort of way, so that you'd have to speak to her twice before she'd hear you—and then she would seem startled. She'd have unshed tears in her eyes at the most unexpected moments —for example, when I tried to appear resolute and cheerful. You see, I'd begun to try to think of ways of supporting her and protecting her. And the thing that hurt me worst of all was her seeming certainty that she mustn't depend on me. She seemed to have decided that she mustn't depend upon anything—that she mustn't hope for anything. And for a long time—for perhaps two years—she became more listless and frail and strange.

"I had left the academy before this time and found a position. I was made assistant to a bookkeeper. A gentleman who had always been a friend of my mother's gave me this chance. The theory was that I should learn book-keeping, so that I might make a real salary after a while. But my academy training had been ridiculously superficial. I didn't even know the multiplication tables. I'm sure I didn't earn the five dollars a week that was paid me, even by helping the clerks when I had nothing else to do. Yet I had fearful

struggles with my pride when I thought of the mean sum I was earning, and the impossibility of making it do. Neither my mother nor I had ever learned to economize, and my office-boy income wouldn't have gone very far in any case.

"And then I did the only thing which I can remember now with any satisfaction at all. I gave up my position as assistant book-keeper and applied for work at another place as a common laborer. My mother had become really ill by this time and I couldn't plan for the future. The book-keeping post might have been all right in years to come, but we needed more money immediately. I was then eighteen and fairly large for my age. And so I went to work for a dollar and seventy-five cents a day, lifting boxes and bales and parcels from a freight platform to the wagons which backed up to be loaded. And you know the thing about that job which hurt worst was not the strained muscles and the blistered hands, but the fact that the foreman had to spare me the heavier loads, putting them on others, and that the teamsters had to come to my aid now and again—though they weren't required to do so. They were generous toward me and I had to accept their generosity without any chance at all of repaying them."

He hung his head moodily for a moment and a frown of deep humiliation darkened his brow.

Estabrook leaned across the table and said in

his intense whisper: "But don't you see that there was a real man at work—doing his level best?"

But Cape shook his head slowly. "It was just a flicker—it wasn't the real thing. If I'd won out, that would have been fine. But I—I failed. I was too soft. I had too many wrong ideas to get rid of. I began to suffer from despondency, and I couldn't throw it off. At first it was only now and again that I felt so horribly dejected; but after a time it got to be a permanent condition. It got so that I couldn't even try to be resigned or hopeful. I began to harbor hatred: toward my work, toward my employers, toward the whole world. I couldn't cast aside my dark mood even when I went home. The time came when my mother and I rarely spoke to each other. We didn't lose our affection for each other. I don't mean that. But—well, we were just out of place in the new world in which we were forced to live.

"And then my mother took to her bed, seriously ill. I should have seen that coming, but I'd gotten so that I didn't notice closely. It was a surprise to me, a new burden, a new grievance. For weeks she seemed rarely to move. That was what I had to come home to when my day's work was done and I was ready to drop with weariness and despair. And here again the cause of my worst suffering didn't lie on the surface; it was because I couldn't think only of her and her suffering. I couldn't get my own wrongs out of my mind. I

had to do a good deal of the housework when I came home. The neighbors came in often, but not in any systematic way. There were times when I had to cook her supper and my own, going to her room a score of times to ask how to do things. You see what a mean sort of story it comes down to at last? And then it all ended."

He paused and passed his hand across his haggard face, as if words couldn't be made to reach. Then with new resolution he concluded:

"One morning I left her room grumbling, chiding her, because she had complained hopelessly after I had done all that I could for her. I left her with a harsh word. . . . And that night when I came home she was dead. She had died alone. She had been dead for hours. She lay there in the dark room, silent in a new, terrible way. Her eyes were open when I made a light. And I could only sink to my knees beside her and reach for her hand and cry out—again and again —'I didn't mean it this morning, mother—I didn't mean it!' And then little by little I realized that I must go out and summon the women in the neighborhood."

Chapter XVI

The Weaving of the Web

THE cashier at her desk aroused herself—she had been lost in a public-library book—long enough to turn on the lights.

The change afforded a not unwelcome break in the stressful moment which had gripped both Estabrook and Cape at their table. Both men glanced up and seemed for the moment to forget the tale that Cape had told. Then Estabrook, without venturing to look at his companion, whose closing words had been uttered with difficulty, remarked evenly—

"The first big burden that was ever put upon you was too heavy—that was what was wrong. You'd have come through well enough if you hadn't been overtaxed. You've no cause to be really discouraged because of such a defeat—if you care to think of it as a defeat."

But Cape obviously took no relief from the friendly words. When Estabrook glanced at him presently he was resting his elbows on the table, and his face, supported by his hands, expressed only a dull despair.

"And—your uncle?" ventured Estabrook at last.

"My uncle—unfortunately, the story has to come back to him. It was still a good while before I heard anything about him; and then a bit of news came quite by accident. He was here—here in this city. He was seen and located by chance by a man I'd been working for. And he kept the matter a secret, except that he told me. He thought I'd know what I ought to do, or what I'd want to do."

"That would have seemed the proper course," remarked Estabrook.

"I suppose so—if it had been anybody but me. But I couldn't decide what to do. Have my uncle arrested and perhaps punished as a defaulter? That would only have seemed to drag my mother's name through the mire. At least, it couldn't have helped her. And for the time being I didn't think of myself or of my own wrongs. My wrongs, compared with my mother's, seemed too small to consider. They didn't seem to exist—for a time. It was only little by little that I began to think in a definite way—toward a definite conclusion—of my uncle. It took me a whole year to get my mind at all straight as to what his real responsibility was. And during that year I kept at my work. I went to live with a neighbor. Our home wasn't ours any more, by this time. I mean, it wasn't mine. I was really at home in the neighbor's

house. And I kept at work until I had paid off my debts. The doctor, you understand, and—and all the rest. There were a lot of them: the druggist and the grocer; and there was a little stone to be paid for. And when the spring came I planted flowers where the stone was, and I got to thinking of her—of my mother, I mean—as being at rest and happy. And then—then I came here."

"You came here because your uncle was here?"

Cape frowned. "That must have been the reason," he said. "I hadn't any other reason for coming here, more than to any other city."

"That was reason enough. And—did you see your uncle?"

Again Cape frowned, and for a time he seemed unable or unwilling to continue.

Estabrook broke in upon him with seeming impetuosity. "But there," he said, "I know I seem to be prying. You mustn't tell me anything more than you like to tell. If I seem unduly interested I hope you'll not forget that I'm really anxious to be of help to you."

"I did see him," said Cape. "I saw him several times. I went to his—to where he worked. But he didn't know me. He really didn't. And I tried to form a plan of some sort . . ."

"You could make him give you what was your mother's, if he's got it yet," said Estabrook.

But Cape only murmured absently: "He's got nothing now."

A beam came and went in Estabrook's eyes. If old Drumm were the monster of Cape's story —and to this theory he held unflinchingly—how apt were the words, "He's got nothing now"!

And then Cape looked at his companion with sudden purposefulness. "There's more to the story," he said in a voice which had become firm. "But I'll not tell it. At least not now." He added cautiously, "There are some rather unpleasant details. Perhaps another time, when we're sure of not being interrupted——"

"I'm sure you're right," said Estabrook. "I shouldn't want you to tell me unless you thought perhaps it might help in some way; and as you suggest, there might be interruptions here." His manner was that of one who pulls down the lid of a desk upon unfinished business, shutting it wholly within. "The important thing," he added, "is for you to take a hopeful view of the future. You must just grasp the fact that what's ended is ended and that your chief concern is with what lies ahead."

He was glad of the pause which ensued; for presently there were steps on the stairway and Beakman and his companion appeared from the rooms above. Again they took in the two solitary diners as if with a certain mild amusement, and then they approached the cashier's desk and manifested an unmistakable intention of idling.

It seemed to Estabrook, too, that nothing more

timely could have occurred than that Cape should have said at that moment—

"I haven't asked you how you've been faring. You see how wrapped up in myself I am! I seem to have taken it for granted that you'd prosper."

Estabrook's laughter was so natural that Beakman could scarcely have suspected it was meant to cover anything, nor did it at all surprise Cape. "Do you know," he said, "you're the first individual who has asked me a question since I've registered at Madam Joan's? I seem to have been doing all the questioning myself! But I'm glad you're interested. Yes, I think I've prospered, in a very modest way. I found a place to work to-day, at least."

"And so you'll not try to carry out your plan——"

But Estabrook interrupted. "That imaginary scheme I outlined to you? Well, in a way that's the sort of work I'm going to do. I'm to collect information of a sort and turn it in to a corporation which makes a business of handling information."

"Information?" echoed Cape, vaguely troubled.

"I began work only to-day and so I've not gotten very deeply into it. I'll be able to tell you more about it another time."

"But at least it's settled that you'll not be going away?"

"Not for a time. Though my chief object is

life is to go away before very long and tackle a job I've made for myself a long distance from here."

"Won't you tell me about that?" asked Cape; and his tone and eyes betrayed the fact that to go away a long distance seemed to him just then the most desirable thing a man might do.

"Of course!—though it's a rather commonplace story, I'm afraid. It concerns two partnerships. The first is with a young fellow who persuaded me to go down into the oil belt in Texas with him more than a year ago. We went into a sort of bonanza town and started a little newspaper. Our idea was to grow up with the town and own a fine property when it became a city."

"And didn't the town grow?"

"Yes, it grew rapidly enough. And my partner and I did well enough in a way. But we were permitted to accept certain oil stocks in lieu of cash for much of our work; and a time came when we had too much stock and too little money—and so it fell to my lot to get out and find a job somewhere, so that my partner could keep the business going."

"You mean that the stocks weren't worth anything?"

"No, I don't mean that—though perhaps a good part of them were useless. We'll not know for a long time what some of them are worth. What we do know is that the town is growing

beyond all expectation; that we've got the first and best daily paper in it, and that if we can hold on we'll come in for a lot of unearned increment some day and be fixed for life. But in the meantime the venture doesn't quite carry itself—by reason of those payments in stock—and so it remains for me to supply a little real money at intervals. The plant made enough to pay our printer and the other larger expenses. All I've got to do is to raise enough to pay a reporter."

He laughed again; and glancing casually at Beakman and the other *News* man, he noted that they were preparing to depart.

"And the other partnership?" prompted Cape; "you know you spoke of two."

"The forming of the second partnership hasn't been quite completed yet. Its permanent formation depends upon the success of the first partnership."

He smiled significantly; and Cape, with a slightly embarrassed yet pleased expression, put in by way of interpretation—"I think you mean that the second partnership means—marriage?"

"That's it!" said Estabrook; and so it happened that there was real gaiety in his eyes when Beakman and his companion finally took their departure. And then he leaned back in his chair, lost in reflection, though he was not thinking of either of the two partnerships he had just spoken of. He was making a new appraisal of the char-

acter of his companion; he was trying to decide how he might best succeed in winning the full confidence of this luckless youth who had told him much, and yet so little.

He had nothing for the moment to do save to camp on Cape's trail—to employ the language of his trade. But Cape was not yet ready to tell him everything. Their acquaintanceship needed fuller developing. And Estabrook entertained the theory that a completer acquaintanceship might be developed best, not by one or two long interviews, but by a number of briefer meetings. Cape needed to feel the impetus of loneliness. His source of supply—of congenial companionship—needed to be shut off again and again.

He arose briskly. "I ought to be going," he said. "You'll understand that I've a good deal of work ahead of me? But I'm awfully glad to have had this chance to talk to you." He seemed on the point of turning away; and then, as if by an afterthought, he hesitated. "By the way," he added, "I'll be coming in at about eleven to-night. If you haven't gone to bed by that time I'd be glad to hold another little session with you—that is, if you think it wouldn't bore you. You see, I'm inclined to feel rather lonesome myself!"

Cape's face flushed faintly. "Bore me!" he said; "if you only knew——"

"Then I'll look for you at eleven o'clock," said Estabrook briskly. "And if you don't mind, in

my room. That'll be ever so much more comfortable than here—don't you think?"

On the street a few minutes later he experienced much the same sensations which a lawyer feels when he has been defending a client whom he knows to be guilty, or prosecuting a prisoner whom he believes to be innocent. There were certain phases of his profession which were always disagreeable at best; it was the sum of his work which he liked and believed in, not all its details. And just now he felt that depressing sense of social isolation which is known to all newspaper men who are working far from home, when they have leisure hours at their disposal.

His judgment as to Cape was that the young fellow was no more vicious than a lamb. He had been ill-trained; he had been fearfully wronged. And at some time, somehow, he had been beside himself—and in that moment the shameless old creature, Drumm, had come to his death.

Estabrook's purpose was to bring fully to light Cape's part in the affair. He had other purposes, too, touching the young man; but these, for the time being, he would have admitted to no one. He would have denied, however, that he was dealing treacherously with Cape. His intention, he would have maintained, was quite the contrary. And as he sauntered through the lighted streets

his mind was a strange compound of the alert newspaper man and the Good Samaritan.

He came presently before a shop which presented certain familiar aspects, and here he paused. It was the second-hand shop which had previously attracted his attention, when he had turned away from his inspection of the scene where Pheneas Drumm had died. And now a nebulous fancy took definite form in his mind, and he turned into the shop. For a time he engaged the proprietor in conversation; and finally it was with a kind of shame-faced air that he made a purchase, emerging upon the street a little later with an awkwardly shaped parcel in his hands.

With his newly-acquired possession, securely wrapped, he returned to his room at Madam Joan's—going in by the front entrance on this occasion, and taking the elevator. And when he had closed his door behind him he quietly turned the key.

For the next half-hour a series of weird and mysterious sounds arose in his room—sounds so extraordinary, in fact, that an occupant of the next room listened for a time with palpitating heart, and then descended to the floor beneath to report to Madam Joan that he feared he had been given a maniac for a next-door neighbor.

Yet when Madam Joan, smiling indulgently, mounted the stairs and tapped softly at Estabrook's door, she found nothing at all to justify

suspicion or complaint. Estabrook was seated at a table, writing a letter. There were no other persons in the room with him. And Madam turned to the complaining roomer with the suggestion that Monsieur must have had a bad dream.

Chapter XVII

The Fly Appears

HE spent the whole evening in his room, though he had not planned to do so. His letter-writing held him an hour or so, and then he lapsed into a dreamy mood during which many pleasant aspects of his two partnerships—of which he had spoken to Cape—passed before his vision; and then he thought long of Cape and his unfortunate plight. When at last he felt the impulse to stir he looked at his watch and saw that it was after ten o'clock—and then he would not go away lest by chance he might miss Cape.

Upon second thought he was glad enough not to stir abroad. He was getting a more intimate, a deeper, impression of Madam Joan's strange hostelry; and this impression was tending strongly to produce a mood well adapted to confidences and reminiscences and the other intimacies of conversation. All about him a sort of eloquent silence had begun to reign, broken only vaguely by whispered or murmuring voices and faltering footsteps, or by the infrequent ascent and descent of the elevator. Something which he took to be

an essence of the house's long years of furtiveness and intrigue and shallow solitude seemed to permeate the air. His surroundings seemed to him eloquent of tragedy in a way: of fading youth, burnt by a too ardent flame; of pathetic age, struggling against discovery or betrayal, of false quests, of wastage.

The noises of the city seemed very far away—like sounds heard during the hours of slumber. They seemed, too, meaningless and futile. Indeed, it was only by a vigorous effort that he reminded himself that he was in a wrong place in which to form a true estimate of life's values and tendencies, and that his two partnerships, both of which were hopefully rosy, were calling him, and that real work lay ahead of him—when Cape came to keep his appointment.

And then, rather shyly yet eagerly, Cape kept that appointment. There was a tap on the door and Cape stood on the threshold.

Estabrook gave only an instant to the reflection that the other man's manner was like that of one who comes from a region of storm and darkness into a warm place. And then he said, cordially, yet without too much eagerness—"Ah, I'm glad to see you! I've been here by myself just long enough to realize that I don't like Madame Joan's very well. Sit down!"

"What have you been finding wrong with Madam Joan's?" asked Cape. He sat down,

obviously ill at ease; yet his relief at finding companionship was evident enough.

"Well, it has seemed for the past hour or so like a place of hiding. That's been my idea. And I like to think of life—everything that goes to make up our life, almost—as a thing to be revealed. I have an idea that when we yield to the tendency to do things furtively—to hide our actions or our thoughts—we're harking back to our cave-man instincts: when the basis of life was thought to be enmity rather than the wish to help."

Cape frowned in perplexity. "But isn't enmity a basis of life still?" he asked.

"Of course not! It's a disease. It's like measles and such things with some of us—a thing which we pass through without much difficulty. It becomes a chronic ailment with a few. But that's because they haven't had the right attention—or because they are constitutionally weak. No, fear of one another—and that's all that enmity is—is one of the delusions which we must all conquer sooner or later if we're to get anywhere."

Cape's glance was bent upon the floor. The frown of perplexity on his face gave place to a wan smile. Presently he lifted his eyes to Estabrook's. "You're an odd chap!" he said nervously; and then—"I wonder if the things you say are just a theory—if you believe in them only in

a sort of academic way—or if you really live them when a real test comes!"

"I live them," returned Estabrook; and he added invitingly, "Won't you move your chair a little closer?—I know I don't always make myself heard very well."

It was the first reference he had made to Cape of his infirmity; and his words, uttered with a singular simplicity of manner, served to draw the other man suddenly closer to him in liking and faith.

"I'm sure it's fine," said Cape; "and yet I can't help thinking there must be a lot of things you've never experienced, or you wouldn't believe that all of life—that it ought to be revealed, as you said." Then he suddenly clasped his hands together with painful intensity. "Why, man, there are circumstances in which one couldn't follow your plan without inviting ruin—without being actually destroyed." He was now kneading his hands nervously; he moved uneasily in his chair; and then—most helpless manifestation of all—he tried to smile into Estabrook's face, and the smile degenerated into a grimace of agony.

"You're leaving me in the dark," said Estabrook gently. "I like to stick to principles. It's the safest way. And you're probably thinking of some special case which—if you'll pardon me—you may be looking at from a wrong angle."

"I'm thinking of my own case!" exclaimed

Cape, in a tone which implied that his statement constituted an irrefutable argument. "And I suppose a man's own case is the most important thing in the world—to him?"

"Yes, if he can look at it in the right way."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cape hopelessly, "I'm thinking of something I have done. Something that can't be undone. Something that has utterly ruined all my prospects. You see, fine theories become nothing but—but fine theories, when you confront them with actual conditions."

"No; actual conditions become wholly different matters when you confront them with really fine theories!"

Cape was lifting his hand almost rhythmically and letting it fall upon the arm of his chair. His glance, like that of a starving man, rested upon vacancy. And suddenly he exclaimed helplessly: "My uncle—I'm thinking of that story I told you, of my mother and the rest, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"The last time I encountered my uncle here I —I harmed him."

"Well?" inquired Estabrook calmly.

"I tell you I harmed him—irreparably."

Estabrook reflected. "For the moment," he said, "I'll put aside the point that there might be various ways of interpreting that expression. Sometimes when we harm persons, in a popular conception of that word, we are really conferring

a blessing upon them—perhaps a blessing in disguise. But let us concede that you harmed your uncle. You must consider: he had greatly harmed you and your mother. You were greatly provoked. If you really harmed him you erred; but under all the circumstances, does it seem impossible to you that you should be forgiven? That you should forgive yourself? That others should forgive you?"

The rhythmic beat of Cape's hand on his chair-arm ended. "I might forgive myself," he said, "but —there is the question of the law. The law isn't a system of ethics, you know. It's a set of rules. And the law—if it's what it purports to be—couldn't be expected to concern itself with forgiveness. It can only say in an entirely detached way, 'You are innocent,' or 'You are guilty.' And in my case—from the standpoint of the law—I am guilty."

But even this seemingly formidable conclusion did not seem to perturb Estabrook. "Very well, then," he said, "let us concede that you are guilty. That's nothing at all unusual. You must just set about putting yourself right!"

There were traces of exasperation in Cape's manner when he spoke again. "Suppose I had burned my uncle's house down," he said. "Suppose everything he possessed had gone up in the flames. Can you imagine my 'putting myself right' on top of that?"

Estabrook arose deliberately and walked to the other end of the room, where he took a pack of cigarettes from a table. He was lighting a cigarette when he returned to his chair. He blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling before he said, "I believe we began our talk, when you came in, along wholly impersonal lines. We seem to have brought it around to something like a personal basis." He smiled whimsically. "You know I really haven't put out that shingle with the words Public Adviser on it."

"I know," returned Cape, suddenly forlorn and adrift again. "But—well, I can't help seeing that what you said about advising people was true; about the disinterested person keeping his head clear and being able to see things in the right way. I hoped perhaps—yet no, I didn't really hope you could help me. Yet it did seem a relief to talk things over with you."

"Very well," said Estabrook briskly. "Let's talk things over. But why not be quite frank? If I'm to aid you at all you ought not to fear to trust me. Please take my word for that. You know—you really didn't burn your uncle's house down!" He was smiling almost tauntingly.

"But I can't tell you what it was that I did."

"Very well. Though I can't help feeling sorry. To get back to generalities again, I repeat what I said before: I like to think of life as a thing to be revealed. I have an idea that when we yield

to the tendency to do things furtively—to hide our actions and our thoughts—we're harking back to our cave-man instincts; to the time when the basis of life was thought to be enmity rather than the wish to help."

He seemed to be withdrawing from his companion then; withdrawing his interests and with them his sympathy. He observed that Cape was struggling with himself. But he seemed to be unaware of this. He appeared to be yielding to the rather mysterious spell of Madam Joan's house; to heed the far-off, obscure sounds, to feel the throbbing of all the troubled hearts which had come and gone since the house was founded.

And little by little it seemed that he was actually casting the weight of these sensations upon his companion too. Cape had sunk into an almost collapsed, beaten attitude; yet his eyes told the tale of a soul which was struggling through deep waters toward a place of rescue.

As neither spoke for a long interval another intangible force made itself felt in the room: the force of a charged silence. It changed from a passive—a negative—force, to an active, positive force. It seemed to hum and then to roar, as if the old house had a departed soul which had come back in agony. Estabrook suddenly sat erect as if with a vague alarm, and his companion followed his example.

"What is it?" asked Cape; and he was whispering now.

"I don't know," said Estabrook. He produced his pack of cigarettes. There was only one cigarette left. This he took out. He also felt in his pocket for a box of Swedish matches. As he was about to open the box a little accident occurred. The box slipped from his fingers and fell at his guest's feet. The matches lay scattered on the carpet.

Cape stooped quickly and began to replace the matches in the box; and as he did so Estabrook turned warily and opened the upper compartment of the wardrobe near him. He touched something within the compartment and then closed the door again so that it remained barely an inch ajar. Then he stooped beside his guest and helped in picking up the matches which still remained on the carpet.

"Thank you," he said, as he received the box from the other's hands. He noticed that Cape's fingers were trembling slightly. Then as if suddenly recollecting, he said, "I ought to step down and get another pack of cigarettes before I forget. I may want them later. If you'll excuse me——?" And immediately he was gone.

To Cape, remaining alone, the tumult of the silence seemed to become intensified. In the stillness in which there was no distinct sound, all the sounds of the world seemed to crowd in upon him.

And presently he realized that one of the nameless sounds he heard was not really nameless, though he felt it, rather than heard it. His heart was pounding like a little drum under a sure, firm touch. He regretted that Estabrook had closed the door of the room when he went out. And then he realized anew that for him, until the end of time, the one most sinister horror of all would be to be alone anywhere, and that the roaring sound which would not depart from him was the voice of conscience.

He clasped his trembling hands. "If I could only tell him!" was his thought. "If I could only tell *anyone!*——"

He could not have explained why the crying need of his nature at that moment was to confide to some broad and sympathetic mind the full story of his disaster. Yet the words repeated themselves in his brain—"If I could only tell him!"

And then a definite sound assaulted his ears and he sprang from his chair, his body shrinking as from the hand of the hangman. He felt his scalp move. A voice, husky and low, yet intense and penetrating, had whispered to him. It was the voice of the man who had just gone out and closed the door; and the words it uttered were: *"Tell him everything!"*

He cowered for an instant and then he tried to combat his terrors. He was the victim of a trick of some sort—that must be it. Estabrook must

have slipped back into the room. He must have re-entered by some other door.

He looked about him narrowly, his body strained in every nerve and muscle. There *was* no other door. And the one door was closed and had not been moved since his late companion had passed out of it.

There was only one place in the room where a man might possibly hide. He stepped to the large cabinet against the wall, only a step away. He opened the door of it with fingers which seemed half paralyzed. It was empty save for a few hooks, ready to receive the roomer's garments. The little upper compartment he disregarded.

Bewilderment gave place to a sharper alarm. There must be some explanation of the matter. Voices did not come from nowhere; and he did not believe that he had become so unstrung that conscience or imagination would play sheer tricks upon him. He stepped hastily to the door and opened it.

Estabrook was there in the distance, waiting for the return of the elevator, which had just passed slowly upward. He was smoking his last cigarette with a sort of quiet intensity.

The distressed youth did not close the door again until the elevator had returned and Estabrook had stepped into it and disappeared. Yet he had stood where he should not be seen. He did not wish Estabrook to know that he had

watched him, or to guess that he had been alarmed. Then he closed the door softly and returned to his chair.

But he was no sooner seated than he started up again. His hands came together in an anguish of alarm. Again that whispering voice spoke to him. Again it enunciated the three words, intensely, yet with an odd effect of detachment.——

"Tell him everything!"

He hurried toward the door, looking back appalled toward the interior of the room. His reason was trying to gain the ascendancy over his emotions, over those weaknesses which have nothing to do with reason. And at length, greatly to his relief, he heard the rumble of the elevator on its upward journey. He heard it stop and its gates swing open. And then Estabrook re-entered the room.

"Strange!" breathed Cape, when the door was carefully closed. "I thought I heard you speaking, after you had gone away."

"Perhaps you did!" said the other, smiling faintly. "You see, I was thinking about you intently while I was gone."

"But you didn't speak?"

'No, I didn't speak."

He sat down leisurely and continued to smile, faintly yet reassuringly. And he evinced no surprise at all when Cape, facing him with something very akin to new strength, said: "I came to a de-

cision while you were gone. I——" He chose his words and then added, as if the form of his utterance were wholly his own. "I'm going to tell you everything!"

And Estabrook, nodding thoughtfully, replied: "That's good. That's what I thought perhaps you'd decide to do."

Chapter XVIII

The Fly Enters

ESTABROOK smoked tranquilly a moment, as if he were thinking only of the deep satisfaction of the smoke. But presently he glanced from the burning end of his cigarette to the eyes of the man who sat opposite him. His glance was one of friendly reassurance and invitation.

"I have told you a good deal about my uncle," began Cape. "But the only thing that really counted——" He leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped. "I didn't tell you that in my last encounter with my uncle I—I killed him."

As he uttered the words he did not resort to the kind of theatrical mannerism which might have accompanied the announcement. There was a note of incredulity in his voice, which had sunk to a low note. His muscles were strained; he gazed searchingly, helplessly, into Estabrook's eyes as if he sought to learn whether his own words could possibly be true, or how completely they would damn him.

"Yes," said Estabrook soothingly, again studying the little spiral of smoke from his cigarette. 'Yes, I know."

The other gulped audibly; a sad expression as of betrayal darkened his eyes. "You knew!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Perhaps I should have said I inferred as much. I knew what the provocation was. I knew that your conscience was troubling you. I had concluded that it couldn't be anything else." He paused an instant and then added as if with a friendly impulse: "Yet that isn't quite true, either. I think I ought to let the first statement stand. *I knew.*"

"But you couldn't have known!"

"Yes, I could. Let me prove it. Suppose I tell you your uncle's name?"

His companion's glance was shrinking with fear. The power of speech deserted him for the moment; and as he stared in terror and amazement, Estabrook continued easily:

"His name was Drumm. Pheneas Drumm." He did not look at his companion now. He went on in a tranquil tone. "You went to his shop several times and he did not recognize you. It was you who told me this, you remember. But you didn't tell me that on one of those visits to the shop you observed that the door in his private office—where the armored knight stood, you know—opened upon a stairway and to a room or

rooms above; probably a storeroom. And you guessed that the storeroom might be entered by way of an adjacent building, or perhaps a fire-escape. And so you chose your night and entered the alley back of the shop; and sure enough, you found a fire-escape. And you climbed up by way of the fire-escape. It was not easy; but you succeeded."

He studied his cigarette minutely a little while. He meant to give his companion an opportunity to speak—to verify or to contradict. But Cape remained silent, an expression of mingled incredulity and intense interest in his eyes.

"You did not mean to kill him," resumed Estabrook. "Such a desperate measure had not even occurred to you. You were not prepared for any deed of violence. You meant to confront him alone. Your intention was not altogether clear even to yourself. But you had the thought of charging him with his crime. You meant to threaten, perhaps. You had brooded so long over your injuries that you scarcely knew what you meant to do. You were practically without funds and it was becoming more and more apparent to you every day that there were no methods by which you could earn money. At least that was your conviction. And you felt, perhaps subconsciously to a great extent, that your uncle might restore to you a part of the money which had been

your mother's, if you faced him alone in the night and demanded restitution."

He heard a great sigh of relief—a tremulous sigh. He suspected that his companion might weep if he looked into his eyes now. He continued placidly:

"Your plan worked perfectly. You got into the storeroom; you descended the stairway. You found the door into the office unlocked. And you slipped out into the private office and stood behind your uncle before he knew anyone had entered.

"It was then that the tragedy unexpectedly developed. Your uncle heard you. He could not know, of course, that it was you. He supposed you were a robber. He sprang from his chair. He lifted his hand quickly and extinguished the one light in the room. And at the same time he reached for a revolver which he had concealed in a drawer of the table at which he sat."

He was startled by an eager, a piteous cry of relief—a voice as of a lost soul coming within reach of a distant light. It was Cape's voice demanding—"Did he? Did he reach for a revolver?"

Estabrook paused, perplexed, with something of the manner of a hunting dog which has been thrown off the scent. Surely Cape knew of the revolver! How else could one account for the fact that it was missing? Had the officer taken it and failed to mention it in his report? He

could not believe so. Nor yet could he believe that Cape was dissembling. He decided to leave the subject of the revolver, at least for the moment.

"He did," he continued in response to Cape's question. "Though in the darkness you could not be sure of that. You feared that he might do so—or at least you feared that he might injure you. You became quite as greatly terrified as your uncle was. You shrank back and your hand came upon a weapon of defense. You had not given a thought to it. You had forgotten that it was there. But there in the darkness, while your uncle groped, invisible, before you, your hand touched the hilt of the knight's sword."

He lifted his glance slowly now. In drawing the picture he had ventured to put in certain details at which he had merely guessed. But he was relieved to read in his companion's glance full verification of what he had said.

He continued: "You drew forth the sword instinctively. But you knew nothing of its use, supposing it to be a real sword, and not an imitation of pewter. You had never learned how to handle a sword. But you realized in a flash that it had formidable weight. And you seized it by the blade and used it as if it were a bludgeon. You struck a blow in the dark. You could see nothing at all of what occurred. But you knew that your blow had not gone astray. You heard your uncle fall.

There had been the sound of a skull being crushed. And the words were flashed upon your brain in scarlet letters—'I have killed him!' And then, stealthily, yet in a panic of fear, you left the place, afraid even to look behind you. And then—then you came here to Madam Joan's. I believe you did not come directly. A man who has committed a desperate deed always seeks his hiding-place by a roundabout course. But in a short time you were here in your room.

"That's all. I needn't tell you how you couldn't sleep, and how you went into the dining-room more for the purpose of catching a glimpse of human faces than from the need of food. And later you saw the light in my room and entered."

He paused and smiled candidly into the other's eyes. His expression told no tale of horror or hatred. He might have been outlining nothing more than a harmless boyish escapade.

But Cape was not returning his glance. He was gazing at nothing, his eyes expressing bewilderment, yet a measure of relief too.

"I ought to add," resumed Estabrook, "that no one saw the things I have described. Your secret is still safe—from everyone save me. I can't explain fully how I know just what took place. I wasn't there, of course. Not until afterward. And it seems that the things I saw when I visited the shop later were not seen by others, not even by the police. You are not to feel that you are

helpless. I repeat, nobody knows but you and me."

"And you——" said Cape, the bewildered expression in his eyes deepening until he seemed quite childishly helpless.

"And I couldn't prove the story I've told—not without your testimony."

But Cape was vaguely shaking his head. "That I struck him with the sword," he said, " . . . how could you know, if you didn't see it? I put the sword back, you know. Something warned me that I ought to put it back; and I had the good luck to find the scabbard in the dark, and to put the sword back into it."

"I examined the hilt by daylight," said Estabrook. "Certain things had clung to it, where it had fallen heavily on a man's head.'

Cape swallowed with difficulty. "And that he reached for a revolver—how could you know that?"

Estabrook met the question frankly. "I told you I couldn't fully explain how I know all that took place. But there was a pistol in the drawer of his table. It was taken out. What more certain than that he'd have seized upon it in such an extremity?"

"If I could only be sure about the pistol," faltered Cape. And then, with the air of a man who comes slowly from under the influence of an anesthetic, he looked at Estabrook. "You're

right, so far as the rest of it is concerned. You've told it all, except how I fought against the temptation to go to his shop at night. I'd had long days and nights of worrying, you know; and I'd come to the conclusion that I couldn't get on at all—that I'd have to go back home and admit I was a failure. And then I began to hear rumors about 'old man Drumm'—about his being a recluse, and wealthy, and mysterious. And when at last I fully decided to go to him the decision came so suddenly that I was on my way before I realized it."

"Yes," said Estabrook soothingly. "We all do a great many things that way, I think."

"But think where it places me! He's to be buried to-morrow. I saw that in one of the papers. And there won't be a soul belonging to him to see him put away unless I go—and you know I couldn't think of going!"

"Well, why should you?"

"And there's the question of his estate—whatever it amounts to. There isn't any relative but me; and yet I couldn't go forward to claim it!"

"Not for a day or so, perhaps—yet why not? After all, it will not be necessary. The probate court will act, if it hasn't already acted. The public administrator will step in. There's a machine kept running for such cases."

He could see that Cape had not been definitely enlightened by these words, and he volunteered

the information: "Their first plan will be to find a relative—or better, a thousand relatives, so that the estate will be eaten up in litigation. And pending the discovery of relatives they are likely to keep his business going, if it's a profitable business. And you've only to step forward in your own good time and claim whatever there is, minus tribute to the machine I've just mentioned."

He was smiling drily; and he was not prepared for Cape's outburst.

"Oh, but don't you see," exclaimed Cape despairingly, "that's not the problem at all, so far as I'm concerned. So far as the estate's concerned, I should think they'd refuse to give it to me, after what I've done——"

Estabrook spoke calmly: "I believe Blackstone has it that a man cannot derive a benefit from his own crime. But that could scarcely apply—here in America, at least—save in a case of first-degree murder. And you've not been guilty of that."

"Well, never mind about that, then. All that amounts to nothing. I'm thinking about the brand I've placed upon myself. I'm wondering how I am to go on living, with the thought that I've taken a human life—even such a life as old Drumm's. His baseness doesn't seem to count now. He was alive, and I took his life. Whatever he was, I've made myself a thousand times worse than he ever was."

"Not at all!" declared Estabrook. "My dear fellow, you're making the mistake of your life in condemning youself as a hopelessly bad lot and in feeling that you've lost everything. Let me assure you: the thing isn't half as bad as you think it is!"

Cape seemed on the verge of rejecting this point of view; but there was something in Estabrook's manner—his calmness, the conviction in his tone—which stayed him. "Are you really in earnest?" he asked. And then, as if seeking a short cut to a solider foundation—"But what am I to do? That's the one question I can't answer. What am *I* to do?" And then, quite unexpectedly, he arose and began to pace the floor almost as if he no longer saw Estabrook or thought of him. A beam of life and hope was beginning to come back into his eyes. "But if he really drew a weapon . . . it makes it out a simple case of self-defense, after all."

He returned to his chair. In the last moment he had become rejuvenated, he held his shoulders erect, a faint color burned in his cheeks, his eyes had become keen. And then, looking down upon Estabrook, the flow of his happier emotions was checked. It was as if a cloud had obscured the sun. He gazed at the other man with something like stupefaction: for it seemed to him that in spite of all that Estabrook had said, he was reading his doom in the eyes which gazed up at him.

Chapter XIX

The Terms of the Treaty

"YOU asked me," said Estabrook, "what you were to do. If you think my advice is worth having I'll be glad to offer it. I'll give you the sort of advice I should wish to have if I were in your place."

"I thought," began Cape falteringly, "you had made it rather plain that I ought not to do anything—just now." He had been made uneasy by Estabrook's steadfast, almost solemn manner. "And yet—of course I should like to know your views. I don't suppose I can let the matter stand just where it is."

"No, you could scarcely do that," said Estabrook. "Sit down, won't you? I think we ought not to be in a hurry. No, I think it wouldn't do at all for you to let the matter stand just where it is."

There was silence for a moment—a silence more oppressively murmurous than ever, since the noises along the distant streets had almost wholly subsided, and but few of Madame Joan's patrons were now stirring.

"And so——?" prompted Cape uneasily.

"It's very simple. There is only one thing for you to do, as I see it. You ought to go to police headquarters and say, 'I am the man you are looking for.' You ought to tell the whole truth."

But Cape cried out in sharp protest—"No, no! I couldn't do that! Not that!" He had become the despairing, helpless creature of an hour ago. It was as if Estabrook had constructed a bridge of hope for him, and then had destroyed the structure wantonly. "Anyone could have thought of that," he added in hot protest. "The disgrace, the danger, the—the punishment; what worse thing could happen to me than all that?"

"Won't you calm yourself?" urged Estabrook. He pondered a moment. "A much worse thing could happen to you," he continued. "A perpetual sense of guilt and fear—that's the greatest evil of all. That's what I'd like to have you escape. That's what you can escape, if you will. Just to let the matter stand as it is: a whole life-time wouldn't set you right, or give you back real freedom. The truth would come out in time, and it might come out when it would be far more fatal to you than it could be now. There's a thorn in your flesh. You must have it taken out before you can hope to have the wound healed."

But Cape shook his head. "Anything but that!' he cried.' "I couldn't tell!"

"But my dear fellow, there isn't anything but that!"

"It wouldn't be fair!" declared Cape. "I didn't do anything, really, that almost any other man wouldn't have done. It was a manlier thing to do than to have set the police on him. And yet if I confessed I'd be branded—at least in the minds of people who would never really know—and I'd be punished. I'd be locked up in prison. I might be hanged!"

Estabrook seemed to consider this judicially, patiently. At length he said: "You mustn't mind being branded in the minds of people who would never really know. It's a weakness to think of that. And you wouldn't be hanged. Nothing like that. We ought to view the thing reasonably, you know. They would lock you up—yes." He smiled dryly. "Milton was locked up, you remember. Let's not be afraid of a phrase. What makes you think it would be so terrible a thing to be locked up—for a little while? That's what life is: a soul in prison, locked up. And we all shrink from having it liberated."

Cape seemed on the point of rising impatiently. "Those abstractions—I know what they're worth. This is not a time for them. They'll do when you're considering the other fellow. I'm not interested in them—now."

"Excuse me," said Estabrook. "I shouldnt have permitted myself to be led into—abstractions. You're right. But come, let me point out the actual conditions and facts."

He waited until his companion had regained a measure of calm and then he resumed: "They would lock you up—yes. And what then? At first it would seem pretty bad. There would be a lot of noise. There would be sensational stories in the newspapers. And then—well, then the reaction would begin. Our old friend Time would take a hand. A wonderful friend, Time. It would work out like this: The public would begin to forget. Something else would occur to divert the public's attention. The machinery by which you would be brought to trial would work slowly. It nearly always does. Before long everybody would forget all about the old dealer in masks. They would almost completely forget you. When your case was mentioned in the newspapers it would be in brief routine items under simple headlines. And when at last the time came for you to be tried, nobody save the judges and the other people constituting the machine would care about you one way or another.

"And now here's a cheerful thought I want to impress upon your mind: Another good friend would come to your aid, following our old friend Time. The new friend would be Facts. Sensationalism, with its power to annoy you, would have died. Judgment without knowledge, condemnation without a hearing—all the weapons of ignorance—would have disappeared. Facts would begin to assume the upper hand. The other

side—extenuating circumstances—provocation—the theory of self-defense—all these agencies would come forward. They would all aid you. You'd have real friends to take the places of the invisible, unreal enemies who had made things look so dark for you in the beginning. It wouldn't be so bad, really. I've watched the process scores of times. You may believe what I tell you."

Cape had been far from unimpressed by the other's argument. He had been examining the exhibits placed before him and they had seemed increasingly desirable and interesting. And then, true to the habit of the rustic mind, he had begun to see his situation through the eyes of the group of persons who knew him at home, and his stubborn resistance reasserted itself. "But to go voluntarily and tell," he argued, "when there's a chance they might never find out—I can't quite see why I should do that, after all!"

Estabrook regarded him musingly, a little hopelessly. The man's inability to grasp the problem in an impersonal way; his eager youth, with its blundering and shallow impulses—these seemed really formidable obstacles in the way of a right solution of the problem.

"Let me try again," he said, as if he were addressing himself rather than his companion. "You don't mind my saying how I feel about it, at least?" He shifted his position in his chair and slowly settled into an attitude of thoughtful re-

pose. Presently he said—"You've probably heard a lot of lectures in your time. Lectures and sermons—such things. But I doubt if you ever heard one that applied to you and you alone as completely as the one I'm going to deliver right now."

He paused and smiled; and then, noting that his companion's mind was wandering—that he was probably making his mind up for himself—he put an additional note of crispness into his voice.

"I'm going to take a text," he resumed, "for the sake of a suitable atmosphere. The text is The Truth Shall Make You Free. And, by the way, it's a text that's got a lot in it for every last man and woman in the world, no matter what they've done." Then, with a sudden change of manner—with a warmth and impetuosity which almost startled the other man, he said—"Look here, Cape, did you ever hear it said that life is an adventure? Of course you have! But did you ever stop to think what that meant? You know, it's a good adventure—if you don't cheat. It can't help being a sorry adventure if you think you can get along without being on the level. If you make up your mind not to cheat there's nothing that can happen to you that you need really to fear. Just now you're thinking of going to the penitentiary as if it meant good-bye to everything. But think of the value of knowing just what life in the penitentiary is if you could study it in the right way! Some mighty big people have gone

to a lot of pains to find out. If some wise man could find out exactly and tell the world he'd be doing a far greater service than the fellows who reach the poles. Mind you, I wouldn't go to the penitentiary voluntarily—without real cause, I mean—because I believe there are plenty of other things to find out. But I'll assure you of this: if it were up to me either to go to the penitentiary or to cheat, I'd proudly go to prison, and I'd make every minute of my prison term count.

"You see, a man's got a right to dance almost any measure that happens to appeal to him—if he'll only remember to pay the fiddler after he has danced. You've got a right to flagons and apples, if only you'll settle with the man who runs the wineshop and with the chap who owns the orchard. There's only one rule. *You must pay.* And while you're paying you're learning what things are worth the price that's asked for them. That means progress. That means future wisdom. But you'll never get a right idea of values unless you pay as you go; pay for every single thing, and count it a privilege to pay."

He paused and looked into Cape's eyes, which were like the eyes of a child when it observes a fascinating yet obscure object.

"We'll suppose that you are required to go to prison," resumed Estabrook. "It will be hard, of course. The experience may not do you a bit of good in itself. But think how you'll feel when

you've served your time, and the warden has called you into his office to notify you that the day of your release is at hand, and you stand at last outside the prison gate with the free light and air about you, and the world before you. Can't you imagine the sensation of having squared up? No living man could say to you—'You cheated; you didn't pay.' You'd be all set for a fresh start. The world would be a new world.

"But look at the other side of it: Suppose you should decide to run away, to hide without paying. Should you feel right for a minute? You know you'd not! And you'd keep feeling worse every day as long as you lived. You'd be forever ducking your head in the presence of honest men. You'd become a trembling coward. And that's a condition that becomes progressive. The poison of secrecy and cowardice would eat further and further into your character until it wouldn't leave you a single sound impulse. You'd become worthless through and through. And so at the end of the adventure—in the day of your old age—you'd curse the day you were born, and even your curse would be so feeble that no one would shudder or care. The persons who might be witnesses to your death would simply say: 'He was one of the poor creatures who cheated.' And they would pass on, forgetting you."

The expression in Cape's eyes, still fixed upon vacancy, had changed slightly. The object he

seemed to behold was still fascinating—but it was now becoming less obscure.

"Now, a last word," added Estabrook. "I've been placing the darker aspects of your case in the foreground. As a matter of fact, I don't believe you'd be required to go to prison. I believe you'd be acquitted. I mean to say, I believe an intelligent court would write across your bill—'Paid in full.' I don't believe you're guilty of the crime of murder, not in any degree. I'd want to appear as a witness for you. I'd relate how I found a smear of oily blood and hair on the handle of the knight's sword: proving that you laid hold upon a weapon *after you entered the shop.* I'd testify that a pistol had been removed from a drawer in your uncle's table only a short time, apparently, before his death. Such testimony would point unmistakably to self-defense. And my testimony would strengthen your own.

"Just the same, you must remember that you've a price to pay. You must stand out in the open. You mustn't be afraid. You must do your part toward establishing the real truth. But can't you see how it would be worth while a thousand times over? To know that you had played your part like a man, and that for the folly and wrong of entering your uncle's shop by stealth you had made full restitution——"

His argument came to an abrupt end. His companion had sprung to his feet. "You're right!"

he cried. "There isn't anything else for me to do. I'm going——"

He had turned excitedly toward the door, as if all that he desired or cherished lay in the path which Estabrook had pointed out to him. After long inactivity the lumbering elevator was heard moving.

Estabrook arose with a tranquillity which he assumed with difficulty. "But—not quite that way," he suggested in a detaining tone. "If you don't mind—will you sit down again for just a minute?"

Chapter XX

Estabrook Shows His Hand

THERE are a few things I want to explain before you go any further—before either of us goes any further," said Estabrook.

Cape faced him inquiringly and remained in his place reluctantly, it appeared. "If it could wait until another time—what you have to say, I mean," he said. "I can't believe there's anything else I need to hear. You've made my situation perfectly clear to me—so clear it seems to me remarkable that I shouldn't have known, without advice, just what I ought to do. We'll meet often again, I hope——"

"Of course we shall. But on the whole I should think it might be better if you didn't report to the police to-night."

Cape's expression darkened momentarily. "It would seem so much easier at night," he said. "There'd be only a few to see. And in the morning when I woke up the worst would be over—that's really how it occurs to me. It wouldn't seem at all difficult to go to-night. But you know . . . I don't believe I act generally on principle, as you

do. I can't help being what I am; and I'm afraid when daylight comes and the same old picture of the world comes back to me—its trivial, commonplace ways—I'd lose the—the sort of vision I've got to-night. It would be easy to go to-night, because to-night going seems the easiest, simplest way."

"Still—won't you sit down? You see, I shouldn't feel at all satisfied if I didn't add a few things to what I've said to you. It's not that I shrink from the responsibility I've taken. I haven't a doubt in the world that I've pointed out the right course to you. But I shouldn't want you to think afterward that I'd had a base motive. I'm hoping you'll say, ten years from now, perhaps a year from now, 'Estabrook was a real friend. He was square.'"

"I shall," said Cape, with conviction.

"Well, let's see. In the first place I went to tell you something about the sort of work I'm doing. You know I told you it was gathering information. But there was something else I might have added to that. I'm with one of the newspapers here—a reporter. And the first thing I shall do, when you've given yourself up to justice, will be to write a full account of all you've done. It will be printed, every word, in the *Vidette*."

Cape's face became a curious study in emotions, in an expression of bitter grief, crystallizing through the mingled expressions of bewilderment

and doubt. He searched his companion's eyes with a shocked, incredulous stare; and when he knew he had comprehended aright his glance fell with the shame with which one contemplates a betrayer. He could not speak for a long moment; but at last he managed to say in a low, faltering voice—

"And you meant to—to write it all for the paper, from the beginning?"

"Yes. Though my attitude has changed considerably since the beginning. At first you were to me just one of an unknown army of a million blundering men. I meant to tell the truth about you—not maliciously, you know, nor with any personal feeling. I meant simply to assemble the facts and make them public. But almost from the beginning I saw that I ought to help you, too—that I *could* help you. The picture of your boyhood you drew—those days of aimless studying at the academy, and your blind faith in the future, and then the fine struggle you made for your mother's sake—it all made your case different. I wanted my story to work out right—yes. But I wanted your story to work out right, too. I made up my mind that it *should* work out right. Can you understand that, and do you believe me?"

"I believe you," said Cape in a low voice. But an expression of misery still darkened his eyes.

"Well—there the matter stands. There wasn't a word I said to you that I shouldn't have said

to my own brother. I believed—I still believe—that every word I uttered was true."

"But to be the first to make my shame public!"

"To be the first to tell how you resolved to do what was right!"

"Well—all right!" said Cape, again preparing to go.

"Again—I'd be glad if you'd decide not to go to-night," said Estabrook.

Cape faced him with a dark flush. "You mean it will serve your interests if I wait until to-morrow?"

"I mean it will serve *your* interests if you wait until to-morrow—though I confess it will serve my interests too."

"Perhaps I shouldn't be so unreasonable as to suppose that my interests matter," said Cape with a bitterness which he could not suppress. "Of course, if it's to your interest——" He paused; and after a moment's silence he added impulsively: "No, I'm not willing to adopt that tone with you. I know you've been my friend. I'll not doubt it. Please explain how it can be to my interest——"

"Thank you, Cape," said Estabrook simply. "I'll explain. You see, I know your story—your real story: not just the story of your visit to Pheneas Drumm's shop. There's not another newspaper man in town who does. If I'm given the chance to write your story for the *Vidette* it shall be written in full. If it's written for any

other newspaper it will be incomplete. If the *Vidette's* story appears first it will give its color to the stories in the other papers. It will do a good deal toward setting you right with the public from the beginning."

"I think I see that."

"I'm sure you do. Well, do you know what will be the result if you go to police headquarters to-night, now, and make a statement? Every newspaper in town has a reporter at the Four Courts. At this moment they're sitting in the press room waiting like vultures for word of some man's distress or affliction to come in by way of a patrol wagon or over the telephone. When it comes in they all get busy, each writing according to the style of the newspaper he serves. Their aim, in the main, is to write something sensational. They're good enough fellows, no doubt, but they're working in an atmosphere which kills every instinct except that of the news-monger, the sensation-monger. Their attitude is almost invariably against the poor devil who's run afoul of the law. Their chief idea is to write something for their papers that will make their papers sell. To a certain extent they are unscrupulous, in that they are ready to assume, so far as they dare, that the victim who has come within the meshes of the police is a guilty and vicious creature. And after they've written their story they forget the man who's been stored away in a cell somewhere, and they get

their feet up on their table and exchange cynical views and wait for the next victim to come in."

"And that's what I've got to face?" demanded Cape.

"That's what I mean you shall not have to face," amended Estabrook with decision. "If you'll still be guided by me—for your own interests as well as mine—you'll not take any action to-night. You'll go to bed and get a good night's rest; and I'll venture to say you'll rest much better than you did last night."

"And then——?"

"Then to-morrow I'll take certain steps to insure the friendly offices of the chief of police. If he's at all the sort of man he ought to be I'll win him over to your side. And then to-morrow night, at an hour which we'll agree upon later, you'll take the big step—which I'm sure will prove largely a formality—of giving yourself over to justice."

An element of confusion remained in Cape's eyes. He pondered a moment and then asked, "And your story?——"

"My story," said Estabrook, "will appear the next morning—exclusively in the *Vidette*."

Chapter XXI

Setting the Stage

AT eleven o'clock the next morning Estabrook was ready for breakfast—yet not quite ready. He had not located Cape; and while he was reasonably confident that his plans would not miscarry, he felt it very much safer to leave no precaution untaken; and one of the precautions which seemed to him most important of all was to keep as closely as possible to the man without whose co-operation all his plans would fail.

Cape had slumbered heavily and long and it was with difficulty that he was routed out and conducted to the dining-room. Yet once wide awake he proved to be also surprisingly cheerful. He had not entertained the thought of drawing back. On the contrary, in the clear light of morning the task ahead of him seemed even simpler and more imperative than it had seemed the night before. He even comprehended Estabrook's situation more thoroughly—and approved it more unreservedly.

The two men had breakfast together, and Cape

manifested a highly gratifying readiness to play his part fully and with discretion.

"You might spend the afternoon reading, or in any other quiet way," said Estabrook. "The less you're seen the better—though of course you mustn't seem to be hiding. We'll meet again in the dining-room between six and seven, and perhaps later in my room; and then we'll talk over final plans."

Later—between one and two—he called on Campbell. And when the city editor looked up at him—at first mildly inquiring, as if he had forgotten him, and then with an amused smile which had in it the element of mockery—he remarked: "I just wanted to report progress, and to get your help in one or two little matters."

Campbell's smile broadened. "And I'm to understand, then, that you haven't any red-handed slayers concealed about your person as yet?"

Estabrook briefly brushed aside the bantering mood. "The hour hasn't quite arrived," he replied. "We'll have our man where we want him to-night. Our story will appear on schedule time, to-morrow morning."

He spoke so simply and with so much assurance that Campbell's manner underwent a complete change. "You don't mean it!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, but I do. There are only a few minor points to be attended to. I'll need a letter of introduction to the chief of police, and after that—

well, I think the only thing then will be for you to say how much space you'll care to give to the story."

Campbell drew a writing-pad toward him and began at once a letter of introduction to the chief. "The story——" he murmured absent-mindedly; and Estabrook suggested:

"You might give it a column, I suppose?"

"Yes, a column, certainly, if you like. I think I may leave that to you." He continued to write on the tab under his hand.

"And I suppose the story ought to be in hand not very much after midnight?"

Campbell did not reply immediately. He finished his letter of introduction and placed it in an envelope. "What did you say?" he inquired: "the time? Well—our city edition goes to press about three. In an emergency we could handle a story that got to my desk as late as two. Certainly it ought not to be much later than that." Then the bantering expression returned to his eyes in a slighter degree. "But why shouldn't you turn it in now, since you're so sure of your man?"

Estabrook frowned faintly. "My work's not done yet," he said. "But I'll keep the hour in mind—two o'clock. You may be sure the story will be in your hands not a minute later than that."

He was making certain reservations in his dealing with Campbell—reservations which he would scarcely have acknowledged to himself. It was his

impression that Campbell was an ideal city editor; but experience had taught him to be wary of all city editors. Their almost universal fault, he believed, was to take themselves too seriously. In the very nature of things—theirs being the larger responsibility—they would rarely trust a reporter implicitly and permit him to do his work unaided and unhindered. Being required to remain, inactive, at their desks, they were inclined to worry, to interfere. And he did not want Campbell to interfere in the Drumm case. He might put another reporter on the case—and another reporter, even with the best intentions in the world, might spoil his well-laid plans. He might make inquiries—of the police or of others—which would cause the delicate structure which he was rearing to totter and fall.

It was his belief that he could have turned in, within the next half-hour or hour, practically every word of the story he expected to write—with the exception of a brief statement from Cape which he hoped to get; but it was not part of his intention to turn the story in now. There were too many possibilities of a leakage—and there was no real necessity of turning in the story before two o'clock, according to Campbell's own statement.

"I may not see you again before midnight or after," he said, as he turned away, the letter of introduction to the chief of police in his hand. "But you'll take me seriously, I'm sure, when I

give you my positive assurance. My story will be in by two o'clock, a column of it."

"Then I'll expect it," said Campbell, all traces of his raillery gone. "The compositors, the proof-readers, the make-up man—all of us—will expect a column story in by two o'clock. And I'm sure I needn't caution you: be sure you're right before you go ahead."

"I'll be dead-sure of every detail," said Estabrook. "I think I may even promise a brief written confession from the man who committed the crime. But in any event, I'll be sure I'm right before I go ahead. Good afternoon."

Chapter XXII

A Compact with the Chief

AT police headquarters Estabrook encountered, first, a youngish man who might have been a bank clerk, judging by his quiet manner and neat dress. His appearance suggested the seamy side of life as little as the well-appointed office in which he sat—as little, indeed, as the squat yet not inelegant building of which the office formed a part. This was the chief's secretary, a man who had been a newspaper man in years past, and who greeted Estabrook with informal goodwill.

"The Chief?" repeated the secretary, in response to Estabrook's inquiry. "Yes, he's in." He pointed to a massive inner door which was now closed and beyond which not even a whisper could be heard. "He's engaged now. Sit down. He ought to be at liberty pretty soon." And he returned to the examination of certain reports of a uniform appearance which were piled systematically on his desk.

Estabrook thought it well not to interfere with his work by idle questioning. He took the chair

toward which the secretary had nodded and prepared to wait. Yet he had scarcely shaped the first question which he meant to put to the chief when the inner door opened. There was now the sound of voices in that inner room: gay voices, and perfunctory laughter, such as mark an amiable exit. Two men in civilian clothing emerged from the room, charging the secretary's office with the odor of cigar smoke, and passed on their way.

The secretary promptly pushed his chair back and arose. "What did you say your name was?" he asked Estabrook; and when he had listened to the reply—"Estabrook of the *Vidette*"—he disappeared for a moment in the chief's office, to emerge with the simple assurance, "All right."

Estabrook's first impression of the chief's office was that it was unexpectedly shadowy and cool and quiet. The simple yet massive furniture included a flat-topped desk on the far side of the room, and behind this sat a very heavy man whose appearance suggested at once sharp watchfulness and a thoroughly-mastered repose.

The caller went close to the official's desk before he spoke; as always, he was mindful of his defective voice and of the fact that it was a source of irritation to those whom he addressed at a distance. And then he said, "I've a letter to you, Chief, from Mr. Campbell of the *Vidette*."

The chief's rather expressionless face softened perceptibly at the sound of Campbell's name. He

took the letter of introduction from Estabrook's hand. "Sit down," he said; and he opened the letter in a leisurely manner as if he anticipated a pleasure in reading it. Once he glanced up with an inquiring expression when Estabrook moved his chair unusually close to the desk before he sat down; and then, as if he understood, he again gave his attention to Campbell's letter.

And presently he was asking pleasantly, "Well, Mr. Estabrook?"

"I'm assuming," said Estabrook, "that you'd like to put your hand on the man who slew old Pheneas Drumm."

The chief seemed nonplussed. "Why—yes!" he said. "Yes, certainly."

"And—may I ask?—your men haven't any clew to his whereabouts as yet?"

"A man from the *News*—Cook—was asking me that an hour ago. I believe they haven't. The fact is, you men labor under a good many delusions as to criminals and clews. They're often pretty hard to locate. A first-class crook is even harder to find than a first-class police officer—and if you believe the *News*, that's pretty hard."

Estabrook interposed diplomatically: "It happens that I don't believe the *News*."

"All right. You see, the crooks we have to deal with, or try to deal with, are so disobliging that they don't take their cues from the crooks on the stage and in romances. They don't haunt the

scenes of their crimes, so far as we can learn; they don't jump when they see their shadows; they don't tremble when they're spoken to. My own theory is that they're so callous they don't mind much of anything—generally speaking. In a crowd of a thousand men I'd no more expect to pick out a man who'd commit murder than I'd expect to pick out a man who'd beat his wife or cheat his customers. Each man in these classes thinks that what he does is his own business—and it's pretty hard to convince him of the contrary."

Estabrook nodded and smiled. "I'm sure that's true," he said. Then, after a thoughtful pause, he added, "But it happens that the man who slew Pheneas Drumm is rather in a class by himself."

The chief looked at his caller with a certain long-suffering patience. Plainly he regarded him as a man who had been reading "Sherlock Holmes" somewhat to his disadvantage. "Possibly," he said.

"I'm quite sure of it," said Estabrook.

"Are you, indeed?" inquired the chief in a tone not free from irony. "And may I ask how you're sure?"

"Because I know the man rather well.'

The chief simply stared.

"Not only that, but I know where he is, what he's doing—in a general way—and what movements he contemplates. More: I'm prepared to take any officer you'll choose to where he can ar-

rest the man. I'd only like to make one condition, Chief—that is, if you thought it a fair one."

The chief's countenance had become inscrutable. "And what's the condition?" he asked.

"It's purely a newspaper man's condition—or at least that's the way it will appear to you. I needn't describe to you the rivalry which usually exists between newspapers occupying the same field. Between the *Vidette* and the *News*, for example?"

"Go ahead."

"As I'm working for the *Vidette* people—fine people to work for, by the way—I'd like to manage so that the story of the capture and the confession and the rest of it should appear exclusively in the *Vidette*."

If the chief considered this scheme feasible he did not say so; yet Estabrook thought he read in his eyes a dawning approval and acquiescence, coupled with a lingering skepticism of all that his visitor had said.

"My idea is this: I will take an officer or two —one will be enough, since the man is as harmless as a child—to my room at a certain hour to-night. The man will be there. He will be arrested. But he will be held quietly in my room until three or four o'clock in the morning, without any report having been made to you or to any of your subordinates. The purpose of this you'll see at a glance. The story will be in the office of the

Vidette in time for to-morrow's issue. It will not be in the office of the *News* until too late for to-morrow's issue. We'll have the story exclusively. That's all."

The chief cast a meditative glance at his desk and presently he lifted his eyes to Estabrook's. "That will be all right," he said shortly.

Estabrook pondered. "I don't like to suggest that all your men are not trustworthy," he said at length; "but you know the ways of police reporters are somewhat uncanny, at times——"

The chief interrupted. "I'll take only two of my men into my confidence. And those two men . . . I won't say they're brighter than the police reporters; but I will say they possess the superior merit of knowing how to be silent. To avoid mistakes of any sort you shall meet these two men now."

He pressed a button on his desk, and the form of the secretary almost immediately appeared in the doorway.

"I'd like to speak to Meade and Hankins," said the chief. And then he explained to Estabrook: "Meade and Hankins are secret service men. I brought them in only a week ago from outlying precincts. I know them to be keen fellows, and they will serve your purpose nicely, since they and the police reporters don't know each other at all. Their movements will attract

as little attention as if they were well-behaved visitors from out of town."

Estabrook's eyes were still beaming when the two officers entered the office; and they did not cease to beam their increasing approval when he listened to what the chief had to say to them.

"Mr. Estabrook, here," said the chief, "knows of the whereabouts of a man we want to arrest. He'll make an appointment with you——"

"At Madam Joan's Hotel, at twelve o'clock to-night," said Estabrook.

"And you are to arrest your man and hold him in the room where you find him until three o'clock——"

"May we say three-thirty?" interrupted Estabrook.

"—Until three-thirty in the morning. Then you'll remove him quietly to the central station. You'll act throughout with perfect secrecy."

Estabrook arose and shook hands with the men. "At Madam Joan's Hotel at twelve o'clock," he repeated, and he added; "and ask for Estabrook, Room 361."

After he had thanked the chief and had moved toward the door, Estabrook turned for a final glance at the heavy figure behind the flat-topped desk. The chief's glance, following him, was an odd combination of seriousness and a thinly veiled irony.

He could not resist the temptation to pause and

say, "Chief, this man—the one we're going to arrest, you know—is the oddest chap of his kind you ever saw. *He jumps when he sees his shadow and he trembles when he's spoken to!*"

And then he was gone.

Chapter XXIII

"Pieces of Eight"

IT lacked a little to seven o'clock that evening when Estabrook appeared at Madam Joan's. He had spent a considerable part of the afternoon in following the body of Pheneas Drumm to its final resting-place in the city's largest cemetery—a place far out on a suburban hill. He had scarcely hoped to discover any facts which might be of value to him; he had gone, as he put it to himself, to be on the safe side. And he had been astounded to note how great a number of persons had manifested an interest in the funeral. He had been unable to gain admittance to the undertaking parlors where the services had been conducted. The place had been thronged. He had obtained a seat in the car belonging to the undertaker and had been enabled to go to the cemetery without delay. He had achieved this by invoking the power of that open sesame, his reporter's badge. And he had learned that a very appropriate service had been conducted by a city missionary—formerly pastor to a wealthy congregation in a good neigh-

borhood—who had dwelt very aptly upon the late Mr. Drumm's association with masks, and with the soothing thought that life itself is a mask which mankind puts aside only when the realities which lie beyond the grave are to be entered upon.

At Madam Joan's he encountered Cape, whereupon he drew a long sigh of relief. He had not feared that Cape would fail him, but he was willing to confess to himself that as the moment for the last act in the drama drew near he was becoming a bit nervous. And now, glancing appraisingly at Cape, he read the fact that his *protégé*—if he might apply that term—was in no danger of wavering in his decision.

"We'll have dinner right away," said Estabrook cheerfully. "though in passing I want to speak to Madam Joan. There's just one more detail to be attended to——"

They encountered Madam Joan just at that moment. They had met in Estabrook's room, and they were passing through Madam's private office on their way to the public dining-room. Madam had just turned aside from a conference with two gentlemen, both of whom Estabrook remembered to have seen before, though he knew the name of only one of them.

The first was Beakman of the *News*. The second was the *News* reporter whom he had encountered in the shop of the late mask-dealer. The two appeared to have something further to say

to Madam, and they now waited until after she should have spoken to Estabrook.

Madam was all sprightliness and good cheer. "I wanted to ask Monsieur if he had found everything to his liking," she said, smiling rather too brilliantly into Estabrook's face. She scarcely seemed to see Cape.

"I couldn't be better pleased," declared Estabrook. His complete satisfaction was unmistakable. Then he lowered his voice so that even Madam caught his words with difficulty. "I want to take this occasion to advise you, Madam," he said, "that a number of gentlemen will hold a sort of conference——"

He glanced lightly over Madam's shoulder. It seemed to him that Beakman and his companion were much too frankly curious as to the nature of his confidences with Madam Joan.

Madam noted his glance. "Monsieur need feel no uneasiness," she said. "That gentleman is Monsieur Beakman."

"I know. And his companion?"

"His companion——" Madam tapped her forehead with her finger-tips in droll confusion, her expression meanwhile conveying the assurance that Monsieur Beakman's companion was really a person of no moment. She smiled with relief. "—Monsieur Cook. That is his name. He is one of Monsieur Beakman's subordinates."

Estabrook nodded. He recalled the name. It

was that of the police reporter on the *News*. He had first heard it on the occasion of his visit to the *News* office, when Beakman was holding a conversation with Cook over the telephone. He shifted his position a little so that the movement of his lips should be unseen by Beakman and Cook. "I wanted to advise Madam," he repeated, "that a number of gentleman will hold a sort of conference in my room late this evening." He smiled. "I wanted to be sure that Madam wouldn't suspect there were conspirators in the house."

She laughed merrily. She touched her lips with an effect of sprightliness with a finger which was much too heavy for that purpose. The gesture meant that she would be very discreet. Yet she looked after Estabrook as he and his companion made their way toward the public dining-room with an expression of amused disdain in her eyes; and to Beakman and Cook she said with an astounding lack of reserve: "It was nothing. Monsieur Estabrook merely wished to notify me that he would have a number of friends dropping in at his room to-night."

And so it happened that while Estabrook and Cape were about to enter upon an intimate exchange of words in the public dining-room below, Madam Joan was finding herself confronted by a truly extraordinary request by Monsieur Beakman. Beakman requested nothing less than that

Madam make room for Cook immediately in the room adjacent to Estabrook's—adjacent to it and separated from it only by a thin wooden partition. And Madam Joan, gazing at Beakman with round, amazed eyes, into which an expression of mischievous humor gradually stole, agreed that Monsieur Cook should have the desired room without delay.

Over their dinner Estabrook questioned Cape cheerfully as to how he had spent the afternoon. He was amazed by what he heard:

"I went to my uncle's funeral," said Cape.

"No!" exclaimed Estabrook, frowning and thinking very hard.

"Yes, I did. I suppose that sort of sentimental thing has gone out of date a good deal; but when I remembered that I was the only living relative he had I decided that I ought to go to his funeral, whether I wanted to go or not."

Estabrook continued to consider a moment longer; then he said with a certain decisiveness—"I'm sure you're right. If you felt you ought to go, of course you did the right thing." He added presently, "and you don't think you were conspicuous in any way?"

"Very far from it," declared Cape. "You wouldn't have dreamed so many people would be there. It was curiosity, I suppose. If I hadn't gone pretty early I'd never have gotten in at all. There were scores of men and women there—

rather ordinary appearing people, too. There's no possibility that I was singled out in any way. There was a regular service by a minister, who made a wonderfully good address. On the whole I'm glad I went."

"But you didn't go to the cemetery?"

"No. There wasn't any provision made for that, of course. I couldn't even follow in a street-car, because I didn't know where the cemetery was." His statement had closed on a gloomy note; and for a time he sat silent, yielding to a despondent mood. But almost immediately he pulled himself together. "It's all right, however," he said. "After all, it was only a formality."

Estabrook was regarding him musingly. "And you know there'll be another formality for you to go through with before very long—I venture to believe in a day or two."

"You mean?——" asked Cape, a shrinking expression showing on his countenance.

"Nothing unpleasant. Far from it. You'll have to go forward and claim your uncle's estate. I mean, after the legal machinery has been set turning and the court says to you in effect, 'Now, Mr. Cape, step forward and let us hear what you have to say.' "

The recurring thought of his uncle's estate seemed almost to bewilder Cape for a moment. He said musingly—"His estate—I wonder if it will prove to amount to anything, after all."

"I'll be able to let you know very soon," said Estabrook. "Our routine men call at the courts every day to see what business has been transacted. When they get around to the Drumm case the facts will be brought into the office. That's always true of every big newspaper."

They were silent for a moment. They had had the dining-room to themselves; but now a casual diner had entered, and dropping a copy of one of the evening newspapers on the table before him, had taken a seat not far from Estabrook and his companion. At the same time the voices of newsboys, rising as if their springs of action had been newly wound, drifted up from the street. A final edition was being sold.

"You'd think the world had come to an end, from the noise he makes," commented Estabrook, with an ear turned toward the noise from the street. "Yet it's likely only the routine final edition."

"And nothing in it," remarked the diner who had just entered. He rather unceremoniously tossed his copy of the paper over to the table at which Estabrook and Cape sat.

But there was something in it. There was the public administrator's first report on the estate of the late Pheneas Drumm.

Estabrook glanced at his companion warningly; and then the two together read the item relating to the dead man's estate. Figures in the head-

line arrested their attention: $600,000. That was the estimated value of the estate. Certain safe deposit boxes had been opened and examined. There was one of these in each of several financial institutions. The details followed briefly and simply. Much of the estate was represented by stocks which were of questionable value. Another portion was represented by stocks which at one time had been supposed to be all but worthless, but which, as a result of certain developments, had mounted sky high. And there were bonds and titles and other assets, together with a considerable quantity of currency. Conservatively estimated, the report declared in conclusion, the value of the estate would amount to $600,000.

Cape gazed at his companion in amazement. He leaned forward and whispered in a tone of bewilderment—"Six hundred thousand dollars!"

And Estabrook, with a glance of caution toward the other diner in the room, echoed back—but in a tone of assurance—"Six hundred thousand dollars!"

A light began to beam in Cape's eyes, and Estabrook mused "He must be a mercenary sort of chap, after all." But what Cape said was——

"If it isn't all a dream—if it turns out to be even one-tenth true, I know a fellow who's got a couple of partnerships in his mind who isn't going to wait any longer to have his ship come in!"

Chapter XXIV

Somebody Blunders

THE little Swiss clock in Madam Joan's office struck the hour delicately: in a voice which was nicely calculated not to shock the nerves or to awaken the consciences of her patrons in adjoining rooms, where murmurs as of a tranquil sea arose. Madam looked at the face of the clock graciously, as if she had been accosted by a really beloved patron. "Twelve o'clock!" she said. She had not realized that the midnight hour had come so soon.

She seemed for the moment a creature of gentle contentment and repose, though you would have known, if you had been really acquainted with her, that her mind was in a score of places at that very moment, and that she knew almost in detail what was transpiring in every part of her mysterious house of entertainment. For example, she knew that Estabrook and Cape were now in Estabrook's room, awaiting the visitors of whom Estabrook had spoken to her in a rather significant manner. She also knew that the young man who was inconspicuously glancing at the pages of the hotel register, as if he were trying to find the name of a

friend, was in fact not paying the slightest heed to the names which passed before his vision. The young man was Cook, of the *News,* and he was furtively waiting to obtain a view of the guests whom Estabrook was expecting.

The clock had just finished striking the hour when two very quiet gentlemen, emerging from the elevator, approached Madam Joan's desk. They were Meade and Hankins; quite unofficial-looking officers who, according to the chief's assurance to Estabrook, would be unknown to newspaper men—even to the police reporters.

It was Meade who addressed Madam Joan in a voice which was low and civil, rather than well-modulated. "Is Mr. Estabrook in?" he asked.

Madam smiled. "Yes," she said, "and he left word that if there were callers they were to be directed immediately to his room. If Messieurs will take the elevator . . . the room is No. 361 on the floor above."

They thanked Madam and withdrew; and Cook, who had glanced up from his leisurely inspection of the register, commented, entirely within his mind: "Oh—the chief's two new plain-clothes men!" Which is proof that chiefs of police, like all other mortals, will fall into minor errors from time to time.

When Meade and Hankins were gone, Cook exchanged significant glances with Madam Joan, and then he, too, was gone. He had betaken

himself, as Madam knew to a certainty, to the room adjoining Estabrook's—the room which she had caused to be vacated as some slight inconvenience, because Monsieur Beakman had desired her to do so.

"I am afraid," said Estabrook to the two officers, after they had been introduced to Cape, "that you gentlemen are in for a rather tedious wait." He had closed his door quietly, after taking a glance up and down the hall. He had chanced to address the remark to Hankins; but Meade, who seemed to be by nature a sort of spokesman, was the one who replied:

"We're used to that. If you can stand it, we can."

"There are cigars there, and cigarettes," added Estabrook; "and if there's anything else necessary to your comfort I'll be glad to provide it."

It seemed that Hankins did not care to smoke just then; but he accepted a cigar and dropped it into his pocket with a casual and experienced air. Meade was in the mood to smoke, it appeared, and in almost no time he had succeeded in making himself entirely at ease. He was the first of the two officers to address an inquiry to his host. "You don't mean to say that this young fellow here—Mr. Cape, did you say?—is the man we're after?"

"Yes," said Estabrook shortly. He could not

understand clearly why it cost him a struggle to reply to that question.

"You understand," added Meade, "that our instructions from the chief were to make the arrest right away—and then to hold the prisoner here until you were ready to have him taken to the station."

"Very well," said Estabrook; and he glanced rather unhappily at Cape.

"It's all right," declared Cape. "You needn't mind."

"Then," said Meade, addressing Cape, "you'll understand you're under arrest."

"And that is all that will be necessary now, Officer," interposed Estabrook. "I'll answer for the prisoner's behavior."

"I understand," assented Cape, speaking as if the words were a lesson he had learned, "that I am under arrest."

Both officers were now regarding Cape with frank curiosity. Yet neither of the two was regarding him with such utterly amazed curiosity as Cook of the *News* was regarding him at precisely that moment, through an improvised peephole in the thin partition which he had prepared during the afternoon. Nor was Cape's face the only object upon which Cook's eyes rested. His experienced glance had been drawn to a neatly folded manuscript, on the sort of copy-paper which every newspaper man recognizes, on the

table at which Estabrook was sitting. And of all the five faces in the group—including the one face which was invisible to the others—not one approximated, as an interesting study, the face of Cook.

As a matter of fact, those neatly-folded sheets of newspaper copy-paper contained Estabrook's account of the slaying of Pheneas Drumm. The story was as complete and effective as Estabrook knew how to make it, save that at one place there was a single omission, indicated by the words—"Here insert Cape's confession." The confession, in Cape's own writing, had been set down on a separate sheet and had been kept apart because the man who wrote it was not quite sure that he was satisfied with it as it stood. He had written it from constant suggestions by Estabrook; and after the writing had been finished—perhaps half an hour before the arrival of the officers—he had asked leave to think about one or two of the statements he had made in it.

Beside the folded sheets lay a quantity of unused paper and half a dozen large envelopes. For it was Estabrook's intention to place the story in an envelope and seal it up after he and Cape had arrived at a final understanding as to the wording of the confession. That he was an exception among reporters in that he occasionally sealed a story in an envelope is no more true than that he

was an exceptional reporter in many other matters.

Now, totally oblivious of the fact that his very laboriously-laid plans were in a fair way of going wrong, he turned to Cape. "You've only to say the word as to your confession," he said, "and my work is done."

But Cape met his reassuringly candid glance with a frown of perplexity. "If I could only feel a little more certain of that one sentence in what I wrote——" he said.

"It's all right," declared Estabrook decisively. And then, as if to convince the other man, he drew a folded sheet from his pocket. It bore the word "insert" at the top, and was in Cape's handwriting. "It's all right," he repeated, unfolding the sheet. "What's wrong?" And he read aloud:

" 'When he turned toward the table at which he had been sitting and reached for the weapon in the open drawer, I feared for my life. It was then that I realized that my hand rested upon a piece of metal. I grasped the piece of metal without stopping to think, and then I struck in the dark. He had just put the light out. I heard him fall' —that was what you objected to, I believe. Now, what's wrong about it?"

"I'm not certain it's wrong," admitted Cape. "In fact, I'm pretty certain it's precisely true. But it's a guess, all the same. I don't *know* that he

reached for a weapon. I didn't know what he was doing. It was dark. I'd like to believe that I was fully justified—but I don't *know*."

Estabrook became thoughtful. Here was the case of a man who had become involved in a terrible experience, and who wished honestly to set himself right as far as it was within his power to do so. Here was the beginning of a conscientious course, of a deed of reparation, of hope for a new, blameless beginning.

"You see," added Cape, "it was your telling me that made it plain—his having a revolver, I mean, and his intention to use it. It was too dark for me to see. And if I'm to tell anything at all now, I want to tell nothing but the truth."

Estabrook nodded. "I'm trying to obtain for you the benefit of the actual conditions," he said. "I'm looking ahead to the time when a jury will listen to the story of what occurred in Drumm's shop. But if you are not fully satisfied——"

He took his folded story from the table and slipped it thoughtfully into an envelope. "We'll go over the confession again," he said. "I can turn it in separately."

He dropped the sealed envelope on the table and seemed for the moment to dismiss it completely from his mind. Again he turned to the sheet which held the confession; and after a moment's meditation he said—

"Suppose you put it like this: 'When he turned

the light out I felt sure that it was part of a plan to harm me. I was greatly alarmed. And it was then that I realized that my hand was resting upon a piece of metal. I grasped the piece of metal without stopping to think and struck the blow'— How would that do?"

"That's it!" cried Cape. "That's true. That's just the way it was."

"Very well," said Estabrook. "Suppose you make the change." And he passed the sheet across the table.

Cape's unsteady hands took the sheet. He searched for the paragraph which he wished to change; and having found it he was compelled to ponder laboriously before he could shape the new sentence which Estabrook had suggested. His hand traveled slowly and more than once he looked up and asked Estabrook for the right word.

He was still writing painstakingly, and the two officers were looking on in the wholly detached manner in which men of deeds are apt to regard men of words, when a discreet tap sounded on the door.

Estabrook responded; and through the narrow aperture provided by his very limited opening of the door he looked into the pleasantly apologetic eyes of Madam Joan.

"So sorry to disturb Monsieur," said Madam. "but someone wishes to speak to Monsieur Estabrook at the telephone in my office."

He had no thought of refusing to respond. It would be a call from the city room of the *Vidette*, of course. It would be Campbell, seeking information, or assurance . . .

"I'll be back in a minute," he called back into the room. And after closing his door behind him he accompanied Madam Joan along the hall and down the stairway.

He could not escape the impression that Madam was trying to delay him. She walked slowly, yet with the manner of one who does not wish to be left behind. She talked to him almost incessantly—though afterward he could not recall anything that she had said. For the moment it was his wish to humor her; and for each chirpingly birdlike word of hers, uttered to the accompaniment of a furtively appraising glance, he gave back an unruffled reply, though without any appraising glances. He felt that he read Madam easily; and he ascribed her chirping manner to her wish to be with him for the moment—though he could not guess why she should have desired his companionship.

When he reached the office he found the receiver of the telephone down. Madam nodded him cheerfully toward the instrument; and he placed it to his ear not without a very unusual degree of curiosity.

But to his disappointment there was no response to his crisp, "Hello!" He tried again, but only

a murmurous silence greeted him; and at last the voice of Central was saying monotonously: "Number, please."

He asked anxiously—"But wasn't there a call for——"

He was interrupted by a lifeless voice repeating, "Number, please."

He hung up the receiver. "They didn't wait," he said to Madam Joan.

She exhibited just the right nuance of distress. "How provoking!" she said. And she would have commiserated with him, or volunteered an explanation, perhaps; but with a sudden vague misgiving he hurried away, back to his room.

Unfortunately his brief absence had been quite sufficient for all the purposes of Cook of the *News* at whose request Madam Joan had staged the little farce of an imaginary telephone call.

Within a minute or so after Estabrook had left his room at the instance of Madam, Cape and the two officers guarding him had looked up to see the door open briskly yet apologetically and a stranger enter.

"Pardon me," said the intruder, "but Mr. Estabrook wants this envelope on the table. It's a matter of very great importance——"

He had crossed the room rapidly as he spoke; and he had taken up the sealed envelope, together with a blank envelope, and walked out with it before either of the individuals in the room could

utter a word. But in a surprisingly short time he reappeared. "It's all right," he said; and again he crossed the room and deposited on the table the identical envelope—seemingly—which he had just removed. And then he made his final exit.

When Estabrook returned a moment later there was a perplexed frown on his face. He took his seat without a word of explanation; but the frown on his face lingered.

And because of that frown—and because they had had time to reflect—Messrs. Meade and Hankins glanced at each other furtively and uncomfortably. But they said nothing at all, and they were glad that their prisoner did not speak of that brisk, surprising intrusion. For it was beginning to be borne in on their minds that they had sadly blundered.

Chapter XXV

A Summons for Estabrook

AT half past one o'clock Estabrook decided that he need not any longer bear the strain of idly waiting. Neither of his companions had spoken a word for nearly half an hour. Cape was brooding heavily, his eyes fixed abstractedly upon the carpet. The two officers were even less acceptable companions. They were seemingly as alert as they had been when they entered the room, but they had taken refuge behind that dead silence which men of their profession are impelled to cultivate. The house had become silent as death. The city streets had become echoless.

He arose slowly. The signed confession which Cape had at last worded to his liking he had placed in his pocket. He took up the sealed envelope from the table beside him. "I think I'll turn my story in now," he said, addressing Meade. Glancing at Cape he added, "I'll try to be back in a short time. You see, I mean to keep watch with you to the end." He smiled faintly. Then again addressing Meade: "If I should be prevented from returning, you'll remain here until 3.30 and

then Mr. Cape will accompany you to the station." Then he had a final word for Cape: "And at the worst, I'll see you early to-morrow, and we'll go into the matter of obtaining bond for you, and engaging an attorney, and attending to whatever else may need to be done."

He was moving toward the door when he stopped, startled, and everyone in the room stared amazed at the door. Again there had been a cautious rap.

He opened the door wonderingly, and again he was looking into the eyes of Madam Joan.

"It is the telephone again, Monsieur," she said. "I am sorry you should be annoyed."

It would be Campbell, he concluded. Campbell, after the manner of city editors, would be beginning to worry and fret. And he smiled faintly over the thought that he had done his work so well and so completely. He should be able to place his finished story in Campbell's hands within a few minutes now—as soon as he could walk from Madam Joan's to the *Vidette* office.

But when he reached Madam's office a surprise awaited him. For the voice which responded to him over the wire was not Campbell's voice. It was the voice of a stranger.

"Mr. Estabrook?" asked the strange voice.

And when Estabrook had replied the voice went on apologetically yet with a certain urgency: "You'll pardon me for troubling you, Mr. Esta-

brook. I called you up at the *Vidette* office, and when I explained that my business with you was very urgent, they suggested that I try you at Madam Joan's."

"It's all right," said Estabrook. "What was it?"

"I am Doctor Brinsmade, Mr. Estabrook. You may perhaps know of me? Half an hour ago I was returning to the city from one of the suburbs where a patient lives. Out on the Morgan Ford Road my chauffeur stopped the car and called my attention to a man lying by the side of the road, surrounded by a small group of persons. They were about to carry the man into a large old house near by, and they were asking for a physician. To be brief, the man is pretty low, and he seems very greatly in earnest in wishing to see you—so much so, in fact, that I felt I must try to locate you. He won't give his name; he says it wouldn't mean anything to you. He says: 'Tell him it's the guy he bought a meal for.' He's very eager about seeing you, Mr. Estabrook. If I might tell him you will come . . . he's an appealing sort of poor devil, and it's not likely he'll ever ask another favor of anyone."

Estabrook's frown of perplexity suddenly lifted. It was his derelict of Madam Joan's public dining-room, of course. And then his brow darkened again. He had no time to give to any man now, however extreme his need. Yet, after

he had turned his story in, why not? With swift resolution he fixed his mind upon the unknown, invisible presence at the other end of the wire. "I'll come, Doctor," he said. "Tell him I'm coming." And then he made a mental note of the number and street-car route which the doctor gave him.

Five minutes later he was rushing impetuously into the presence of Campbell, city editor of the *Vidette*. "Here we have it," he said, with his large sealed envelope in one hand and Cape's confession in the other. "This is an insert—see?" he continued. "You'll find everything in shape." He thrust his copy into the city editor's hands and turned unceremoniously to go. "A hurry-up call," he explained as he disappeared. And before the amazed Campbell could speak the reporter was beyond recall.

Chance ordained that, as he was waiting for the street-car to bear him out to the Morgan Ford Road address, he should find himself standing side by side with one of his fellow-reporters of the *Vidette*—Ellison. Ellison had been detained in the office later than usual and now he was going home.

"We've missed the last regular car," said Ellison, "but the first owl-car is due in about five minutes." He yawned loudly and then added—"But I thought you were stopping at Madam Joan's?"

"I am," replied Estabrook. "I'm going out

into the Morgan Ford Road neighborhood to see a chap I know." He added by an afterthought—"By the way, how far is it—the Morgan Ford Road neighborhood?"

He flinched almost as if from a blow when he was informed that he had a ride of perhaps half an hour before him. Then a car's headlight became visible around a curve in the deserted street, and Ellison remarked, with another yawn, "There she is!"

They hardly knew each other; and when they had taken a seat together on the car and were moving rumblingly on their way, Ellison remarked, as a wedge to further acquaintance—"I'm glad you chose the *Vidette* when you came here to work. How did it happen?"

Estabrook considered. "I like to work on a morning newspaper better than an afternoon sheet," he said. "I went up to the *News* office, but I didn't particularly like the look of things."

"You probably didn't like the look of Beakman," remarked the other, laughing as if there had been a measure of humor in what he had said. And then he added, in a tone which denoted that he was now speaking of a matter in which he was really interested—"By the way, they're not getting ready to ring any wedding bells up at Madam Joan's, are they?"

"Not that I know of," said Estabrook. He added drily, "I should think not. Why?"

"Speaking of Beakman made me think of it. We've all been wondering if those two coy souls would ever get up nerve enough to call in the preacher."

"Two coy souls?" echoed Estabrook.

"Beakman and Madam Joan. They've been impetuously drawing together for the past ten years. Everybody's been wondering when they'd be able to brave the world and declare themselves."

Estabrook stared straight before him for a long instant, and then he turned to his companion. "Is that straight?" he asked.

Ellison appeared to consider the other's sudden seriousness amusing. "Yes," he said, "so far as their attitude toward each other is concerned. So far as their ever getting married goes, that's a mere surmise. It's rather an odd case."

"Tell me about it."

"They're both getting elderly, as you know. The odd feature of the case is that either should be tempted to behave foolishly. But each exerts a certain fascination, where the other is concerned."

"You're joking, of course," said Estabrook.

"Not at all. There's nothing the least bit romantic about it, that's true. From bits I've pieced together during all these years I'd interpret the case like this: Madam Joan is a fascinating figure in Beakman's eyes, because there's a

pretty good chance that she has quite a lot of money. And Beakman, of course, hasn't a cent —he's been working for the *News* for twenty years."

Estabrook was listening, seemingly with all his mind; yet he was just at the moment recalling Madam's manner when she summoned him to the telephone on the occasion when there was no one waiting for him.

"You'll naturally wonder what equivalent Beakman has to match Madam's hypothetical wealth," continued Ellison. "It's position. To the crowd that frequents Madam Joan's a newspaper man is a near-god. They conceive him to dwell among the stars. And Madam is the worst of the crowd. To her Beakman is the head and front of the *News*. She's not capable of making distinctions, and Beakman isn't the kind to hide his light under a bushel. To her he's the editor. To all ignorant persons any individual connected with a newspaper is practically the whole thing. Even the office boy outranks a bank president, because the office boy gets a pass once in a while. It's the profession's fatal lure: getting something for nothing."

"But about Beakman——" interrupted Estabrook a bit impatiently.

"I've told you about all there is to tell. Beakman is holding back because he isn't sure Madam's wealth is sufficient to compensate him for stoop-

ing to the level of a boarding-house keeper; and Madam Joan isn't quite certain whether a hideous beast of a man, even though he be a newspaper man, is a sufficient prize to compensate her for the loss of her liberty and the complete exercise of authority over all her affairs. I'm making them both out to be perfectly nice persons, you see. But my observation during a long period of years justifies me in doing this."

Estabrook gazed out of the car window at the obscure objects which went sliding by. He wished Ellison wouldn't say anything more. He had been uttering the typical, cynical patter of a certain class of newspaper men: interpreting facts from the worst possible angle, making discreditable assumptions which he need not have made; making a jest of serious things. He turned his head and glanced at his companion, whom he had not hitherto observed studiously. He was a large man, getting along toward middle life. Already the tissues of his body were degenerating into flabbiness. His naturally good features had been coarsened by long years of a kind of irresponsible thinking. He slouched in his seat, pressing his knee against the seat in front of them, like a man who has lounged his way through life. Ellison made him uncomfortable because of all these things: but more particularly by the revelation that there was a sort of affiliation between Beakman and Madam Joan.

He heard Ellison say—"I get off at the next corner." And then he was sitting alone. Yet Ellison returned—even going a block beyond his stopping-place, with the generous impulse to help Estabrook to find his way on the trip he was making. He told him where he should leave the car and what direction he should take, and how far he should have to go. He had the virtue of being thoughtful and generous, after all.

Estabrook rode until he was the only remaining passenger in the car. He was riding through a region of lumber-yards and foundries and manufacturing plants. Grimy dwellings, vacant lots cluttered with rubbish or hidden by weeds, slipped by. And at last the conductor called his street and pulled the bell-cord. He left the car and found himself standing alone in an unlighted, strange region. The car rumbled on out of sight.

Chapter XXVI

The House of the Morgan Ford Road

HE had come to a region where he was aware of earth and air and sky, as he had not been aware of these things within the confines of the city. The earth was forlorn and unlovely. Men had done much to deface it here and but little to adorn it. The air was cool. The sky was ragged with clouds, amid which a full moon appeared and reappeared, glowing and fading.

A road lay before him, descending into the deeper darkness of a silent hollow. Obscure buildings lay at a distance about him, their lights all extinguished. He heard the croaking of frogs down in the hollow. His first thought was to turn aside in search of a walk along the road; but immediately he abandoned this thought and took to the dusty road itself. He descended to the lowest level of the hollow, and then the road ascended again. and a dim horizon met his eye. On distant slopes isolated street lamps burned faintly, wavering in the wind.

He walked rapidly along the deserted road, reflecting anxiously upon the doctor and the doctor's patient. It seemed to him ages since he had

received the summons to respond to the call of the dying man. It seemed to him improbable that he should arrive in time; and yet he had done his best.

At the top of another hill he came upon clusters of buildings. A range factory, surrounded by the homes of its employees—Polaks and Syrians and Greeks and Hungarians—lay at his right. There was a row of shops at his left: groceries, a drug-store, dram-shops, a mission hall of some sort, a pool-room—the flotsam and jetsam of civilization. And presently he came upon a gaunt old wooden structure of the cheap boarding-house type: and here at last lights burned in the windows, and a large touring car stood at the curb. He could see obscure figures moving at the windows.

He looked for a number above the door; and while he looked, vainly, a man of a foreign appearance emerged from the house and stood before him.

He was at a loss for words in which to ask for information; but it occurred to him to ask, "Is that Dr. Brinsmade's car?" And he indicated the touring car at the curb.

The man replied in the affirmative. "Are you the man from the newspaper?" he added. And without waiting for a reply—which perhaps he deemed needless—he said, "He's on the second floor, the first room on your right. Go up."

Estabrook climbed the creaking stairway, guided by an unguarded gas flame above and beyond him. At the first door on his right he paused, bending his ear closer for sounds within, and hearing none. And then he softly opened the door.

Three persons were inside the room, all maintaining a silence so complete that Estabrook feared for an instant that he was too late. But a glance at one of the persons in the room—a man who lay in a sunken mass on the bed—reassured him. There lay his casual acquaintance of Madam Joan's public dining room, and his eyes, if no other feature, proclaimed that he still lived.

Estabrook glanced at the two other occupants of the room: one, a physician, obviously; the other the proprietor of the rooming-house, perhaps.

"Dr. Brinsmade?" inquired Estabrook; and reading the answer in a glance, he added, "I'm Estabrook of the *Vidette*."

"Our friend here," said the physician in a cautious voice, "will be relieved to see you. He's been resting rather well since I sent for you." He had arisen; and now he warily approached the bed.

The recumbent figure did not stir; and Estabrook took occasion to ask, "Was there an accident?"

"A hemorrhage," replied the physician, without removing his glance from the figure of the

invalid. He added in a low voice, "Ah, he's stirring."

Estabrook took two or three steps forward and stood looking down upon the man who lay before him.

Then the face on the sunken pillow turned slightly and a rasping voice said—"Hello!" But the word was accompanied by the ghost of a smile —like a little flag marking the place where courage was entrenched.

"I have come," said Estabrook, groping vainly for less obvious words.

"Sure you have!" came back the waning voice.

The doctor spoke. "Our friend here," he said to Estabrook, "says you're a funny guy!" It was his purpose, clearly, to lift the dying man into companionship, if for only a moment, with the quick and the happy.

"You're a funny guy, too!" said the man on the bed, catching the doctor's eye and achieving again that ghost of a smile. "Sticking by a guy when you could be making money somewhere else!"

"But you had something to tell Mr. Estabrook," said the doctor.

"Yes." He turned his glance upon Estabrook. "I've got something for you to put in the paper. I got it all wrote out—with the doc's signature and the landlord's for witnesses. The doc's got it."

Estabrook looked inquiringly at the physician,

who was nodding, and producing from his pocket a cheap letter-head covered with writing. He passed it over to Estabrook. But Estabrook looked at the man on the bed. He felt wholly in the dark. "What is it?" he asked.

"You know the old false-face guy they took to the morgue?"

"Yes, I know."

The man on the bed lifted his hand and pointed a fore-finger impressively to his hollow chest.

"You mean——?" said Estabrook.

"I done it. I cracked his bean in—me."

"Impossible!" cried Estabrook. The dying man's mind was wandering, of course.

"It's all down in writing on that paper in your hand—witnessed and all. I knew you'd want to put it in the paper. That's all."

"Tell me about it," said Estabrook in a curious tone.

"Sure. I went into his place late in the afternoon. There was a bunch of silly guys—getting ready for a ball or something—looking at false faces and wigs. And I saw my chance and slipped into a tall cabinet and pulled the door shut. I'd been figuring on it, y'understand. I had a bit of gaspipe wrapped in a newspaper. There's a hell of a lot of times there's a gaspipe in a newspaper—if you get me. What did I want to do it for? Better ask why wouldn't I want to do it. He had so much money that it didn't matter which

pocket he stuck his hand into, a wad would come up. That's what everybody said. And he was never known to help a poor guy—he wouldn't even look at you with both eyes, he was that close. And I was hurrying on all fours to the potter's field—the con., y'understand. When a rich guy gets that his friends all argue whether he better go to Colorado or Texas. They give him eggs and milk. When a guy like me gets it he just sits down in the doorway of a vacant house and waits for the wagon. He don't eat nothing. Fine chance he's got!"

He broke off and Estabrook found himself flinching, because the poor devil on the bed was now required to pay toll in coughing for the privilege of using his voice.

"Never mind!" The narrative was resumed. "I hid in the cabinet, and there I sat for hours and hours. I didn't want to use my gas-pipe until it got late. I thought there might be somebody hanging about. But at last I slipped out of the cabinet and peeped around the corner of it. Old False Faces was there. He didn't look no more human than I look like George Washing. He was bending over a book, under a hanging light. And I began to slip up on him."

He paused, and Estabrook, gazing at him intently, put forth a hand to warn the doctor not to interrupt.

"And then it looked like hell broke loose. The

old man jumped up like he'd heard me. But he didn't look toward me. He looked behind him. For why? You can search me. I couldn't see what was behind him—the light hung so that I couldn't see nothing on the other side of the table. And then the old guy switched the light out. And I made a rush for him, for in the last second I'd seen his hand slip along the table and pull a drawer out. I seen something glitter. 'Look out for his cannon,' I says. And I drew back my piece of pipe. And then—bing! something fell on my dome. I saw a million stars. And then I brought my gas-pipe down and caught the old guy the prettiest swat you ever saw. And I says to myself, 'Kingdom Come is where you get off!' And then I stood there for a second in the dark. Dark? It was so dark I thought I was drowning."

He paused a moment as if to straighten out the strands of his story. The doctor, standing a little in the background, looked on with a glimmer in his pensive eyes. He repeated the words to himself: "It was so dark I thought I was drowning." And he reflected that it was a singularly good and apt saying, and that it was strange that lost men often manifested the surest touch upon words. But Estabrook, his eyes widening with wonder, waited almost breathlessly for the continuation of the invalid's recital.

"And then I got scared. Did you ever go be-

hind a curtain at a se-ance?—when it seemed like the air was full of hands? Well, that's the way I felt. It seemed to me like a thousand people were running back and forth like rats, with soft pattering feet. I heard them on a stairway—the soft feet. I heard them overhead. And I didn't wait for nothing more. I opened a back window and slipped out—and so you see, I didn't get a damned cent after all. I might just as well have let him live!"

Estabrook opened the sheet in his hand.

"It's all there," said the physician.

The newspaper man looked down upon the harsh face on its pillow. "I'm glad you let me know," he said.

"I thought you'd be!"

"And I want to come back a little later and talk to you . . . about Texas and Colorado, you know."

The dying man looked triumphantly at the physician. "Didn't I say he was a funny guy?" he demanded.

"And I want to find a friend who'll come and sit with you—I mean, after the doctor's gone."

"A friend?"

"Just someone to look after you, when I can't be here."

A dark suspicion crossed the haggard face. "Not one of them 'Come unto me' sharks?"

Estabrook winced. "No, not unless you want

one of them—though I could find plenty of them who would just want to be kind to you, who'd not bother you at all."

The physician was appealed to again: "Didn't I say he was a funny guy?"

But Estabrook, tense with anxiety, turned to go. "I've got to get my story in now," he said; "I mean, I got to put this in the paper. But I'll see you later." And then to the man who seemed to be the proprietor of the house, "Please show me where I'll find a telephone!"

Chapter XXVII

Introducing Mr. Craddock

A MOMENT later he was in a battered telephone booth on the floor below. A low-power incandescent globe hung near his head, and under it he smoothed out the confession in his hand.

He removed the receiver from its hook and immediately he was speaking: "Central, I've a rather long message to deliver, if I can get my connection. Will you see that there isn't any interruption?"

He was amazed to note that his voice was retaining a perfect calm, despite the fact that every fiber in his body seemed to be tingling with anxiety and impatience. And then he gave the *Vidette's* night number. While he waited he looked at his watch. His heart bounded when he read the hour—twenty-five minutes after two. He leaned despairingly against the side of the booth. He was too late now, almost certainly. And besides, what would Campbell think of him—of the fantastically fickle course he had seemed to pursue?

His body straightened with a jerk. A voice

was replying to him out of the silence—a voice which was listless, almost lifeless, yet it was the voice of Campbell of the *Vidette.*

"Oh—Mr. Campbell!——" began Estabrook; and then he was stunned by the quality which came into that distant voice.

"Is this you, Estabrook? Say, Estabrook, do you imagine you're playing some sort of a child's game?—turning in a lot of blank pages as a climax to your absurd boasting——"

Nevertheless it was good to hear that voice—to feel even the most intangible contact with his own world, and to forget utterly for the moment that he was far out on the Morgan Ford Road, in a wilderness of mean and remote things. He was about to blurt out—"blank pages!" when some subconscious impulse checked him. He could not even begin to guess what had happened to the story he had written, but the name and presence of Madam Joan—that and the story Ellison had told him on the street-car—flashed across his consciousness. He had been tricked, certainly. But if only Campbell would listen to him and believe him! If only at last——

He placed his lips closer to the telephone. "Mr. Campbell," he began calmly, "I've got the story here——"

"Here? Where?"

"I'm in a house out on the Morgan Ford Road——"

"The Morgan—*What?*"

"I know I'm a long way out——"

"It's too late to get anything into the paper, even if you were here in the office!"

"Oh, not too late, Mr. Campbell!"

"We'll be going to press in twenty minutes, or I'll be looking for a job to-morrow at one o'clock!"

"But Campbell—we've *got* to get this story in. I can't explain everything to you now, but there are reasons—Mr. Campbell, if you'll stick just this once you'll never regret it. And here we are wasting precious minutes——"

Campbell's voice came back, greatly mollified. "But my dear chap, it's impossible. It would take you an hour or more at this time of night to reach the office, and you couldn't telephone in the whole story. We'd not have time to handle it. We've scarcely time to handle a line."

"You said twenty minutes, Mr. Campbell. Tell me—is there a phone on the copy-cutter's desk upstairs?"

"There is—yes."

"And is there a linotype machine close to the copy-cutter's desk?"

"Yes, jammed up almost against it."

"Great! Please—*please*—connect me with the phone upstairs, and get one of the linotype men at the receiver."

"But good heavens, man——"

And then Campbell's voice faded away, and

presently there was the clicking sound of metal; and then—"Hello!" came a clear voice into Estabrook's ear.

"Who is this?" demanded Estabrook.

"Craddock—one of the operators."

Estabrook remained silent for a moment, for he heard Craddock exchanging words with some one who had evidently addressed him. And then he began, "Craddock, this is a fair specimen of my handwriting. Do you get me?"

A mellow laugh came back over the wire, and Craddock's voice said, "Your handwriting is all right, young fellow!"

"Well, Craddock—get one of the fellows to hold the receiver to your ear, and get ready to *print.*"

There was another parley in the distance, and then Craddock's voice replied again: "Well, go steady, so I'll have time to send my lines off. You know it won't do to get balled up."

"I'll go steady," said Estabrook.

And then he listened breathlessly to a confusion of noises—like hail striking upon glass; and he knew that Craddock was trying his keyboard and releasing the familiar line of "pi"—

e t a o i n s h r d l u c m f w y p

Then a reassuring voice said deliberately, "Now go ahead!"

He improvised an introduction for the story in brief phrases, uttering his words with the ex-

actness of a metronome's beat. Presently he was reading from the confession before him. Word by word it went into the receiver—and always he heard, coming back from the far away, the reassuring tapping of the keys, as faint as sounds in fairyland. There were seconds when he felt he must explode, from fear that the machine would halt, or that the telephone connection would be broken, or that someone would come into the telephone booth and drag him away from this one critical task of a lifetime. But there were no interruptions, and after a seemingly interminable time he came to the end of the confession, and read off the name of the man who had made it, and the names of the witnesses.

Then he added two final paragraphs:

The slayer lay dying in a house at Fillmore avenue and Morgan Ford Road at three o'clock this morning.

And then—

There was a rumor afloat last night that the crime had been committed by a young man named Cape, a nephew of the slain man. But this proved to have no foundation in fact.

He waited for a long, breathless moment, and then he heard Craddock's voice saying complacently, "She's gone!"

He could have danced with joy. "Craddock old man," he said jubilantly, "if the *Vidette*

doesn't buy you a new suit of clothes for this, I will."

And Craddock replied, not too patronizingly, "Well—say! I'm going to try out my new car next Sunday. The old one got a little out of date. If you want to see the sights I'll be glad to take you along."

Estabrook did not know that Craddock owned three houses which he had bought with his own savings, and that when he left the printing office in the afternoon and went out to the street to meet his wife, who called for him in their machine, he looked precisely like a progressive bank president. He could only whisper back—"I'm sorry, but you know I have to work on Sundays!"

He hung up the receiver and hurried back for a final word with the man upstairs. But a glance at the physician, and then another at the figure on the bed, sufficed to supply him with the end of the story.

He returned to the telephone booth, and presently he was in communication with the *Vidette* office again.

One of the reporters replied to him this time.

"Could I have a word with Mr. Campbell, please?"

"I'm afraid not. He's very busy with a piece of proof just now. What was it?"

"This is Estabrook speaking. Please be sure to get this right, will you? Just one line in the

story Mr. Campbell's reading should be changed. You got a pencil? Take this down please and have it substituted:

"The slayer died in a house at Fillmore avenue and Morgan Ford Road at three o'clock this morning."

Chapter XXVIII

What the Morning Brought

WHEN he hung up the receiver it was with the troubling consciousness that there was yet another task for him to perform, and to perform immediately. Yet so great had been the strain in getting his story into the *Vidette* office that for a moment he could not concentrate his faculties. And then in a flash he remembered.

He must save Cape from that dreaded journey to the police station. He must do this for Cape's sake, first of all; but he must do it also in order that he might utterly destroy the validity of the stolen story which the *News* would almost certainly print on the morrow—for he could not doubt that the envelope he had left on his table had been abstracted by a *News* man, or at least at the instigation of Beakman. No other possible suggestion of its theft was to be entertained for a moment.

And then he realized, as he had done on countless occasions before, how sadly limited is the function of the telephone, after all. It was his presence in Madam Joan's which was needed now

to tear down the false structure which he had so laboriously built up. It seemed almost impossible that a word telephoned to Meade and Hankins should effect the release of Cape, or make plain to those officers the fact that he had made a stupendous mistake in relation to the young man whom they held in custody.

Moreover, he was subconsciously casting about for some means of saving himself the necessity of confessing to anyone save Cape himself, and of course to Campbell, how nearly he had come to committing a monstrous blunder. And certainly the telephone could not be relied upon as a means of adroit rectification—especially as he had so little time in which to act.

He was about to take down the receiver again, with the unshaped thought of calling up Madam Joan's, and getting at Meade, when fortune favored him. Dr. Brinsmade passed through the room on his way out to the street; and perceiving Estabrook, standing in an almost thwarted attitude in the doorway of the telephone booth, he called out briskly—

"Perhaps you're going my way?"

Estabrook's heart bounded. He had been visualizing the route back to town—the endless stretch of starkly hideous suburbs, with a single line of street-cars traversing it, at this time of night, perhaps once an hour. "I must get back to town," he said. He ventured to add, "It's

highly important that I should reach the neighborhood of the *Vidette* office in the shortest possible time."

"Come and get in," was the physician's only response. And he led the way out to the street.

In the machine they spoke briefly of the man who lay sleeping peacefully at last in the gaunt old house they were leaving behind them. "I'll see that he gets the right kind of burial," said Estabrook. "I've a friend who will want to look after that, I'm sure." And then he fixed his eyes on the soldier-like figure of the chauffeur in front of him, and blessed the man for his efficiency and the unhurried manner in which he was making every second count.

The doctor nodded; and he was still ruminating on the words—"a funny guy,"—when the machine completed its task of eating its way through barriers of space, and brought up in the heart of the down-town district.

The doctor had a final word to speak. "You'd better take this," he said, "for evidence." And he placed a heavy, cold object in Estabrook's hand. "Our unfortunate friend back yonder turned it over to me. It isn't loaded—now."

It was a short-handled pistol with a nameplate bearing the name of Pheneas Drumm. And with this in his possession the newspaperman knew the evidence he had gathered was complete.

"Here's my corner," said Estabrook, his eager

hand on the door beside him. He looked at his watch, tilting its face toward a nearby street light. It was fifteen minutes past three. "Good night," he said, "and thank you."

The doctor put forth his hand listlessly to help close the door; and then the machine was gone.

Estabrook rushed into the lobby of Madam Joan's, making an almost ludicrous effort to seem composed. He reminded himself that he really must not arouse the house. The elevator was no longer running, and he rushed up three flights of stairs, three steps at a time, yet on tip-toe. And his heart sank when he reached his own door, for beyond that door not a breath of sound was audible.

Yet when he had opened the door his face became radiant. They hadn't gone yet!

Cape was lying, fully dressed, on Estabrook's bed, sound asleep; and Meade, who seemingly had just arisen from his chair, was moving toward the bed as if the time had come to awaken the sleeper. He turned at the sound of Estabrook's entrance. "We were just getting ready to start," he said.

"Never mind," said Estabrook. "I've certain things to explain to you. Will you sit down?" He glanced anxiously at the bed. It had occurred to him that it would be a very fine thing if Cape remained asleep for the time being. And then he added, with a kind of inscrutable glance at both officers, one after the other—"We've been play-

ing a sort of farce here, you two and myself. I won't go into the nature of it just now. I'll only say that it's time to get down to business. You'll excuse me, I hope, for misleading you; but he's not the man you're after." He nodded toward Cape. "Your man is in a house out on the Morgan Ford Road. Unfortunately, he has just died. I've his confession, properly witnessed. I would suggest that you go out to the house I've mentioned and verify what I've told you. You ought to have a talk with the proprietor. And then you can make your report to the chief to-morrow accordingly."

Officer Meade smiled complacently. "What's this?" he asked.

"It's the truth," declared Estabrook.

"And you want to tell me that cub there"—with a jerk of his head toward the bed—"has been stalling? Get out! He's the man we arrested and he's the man we want."

Estabrook produced the written confession he had brought back with him. "You might examine this," he said, unfolding it and holding it before the officer's eyes.

"I don't need to. I'll take it along and show it to the chief to-morrow, if you like; but my business is with this fellow on the bed."

"But—read it!" insisted Estabrook.

The officer read it, his companion looking over

his shoulder. But the sheet of paper still remained in Estabrook's hands.

"Brinsmade!" exclaimed Meade at last. He was impressed now. It seemed that Brinsmade was a physician known to everyone.

And then Office Hankins exclaimed—"Old Pete Moss!" And by way of explanation he informed his fellow officer that he had walked a beat in the Morgan Ford neighborhood a year ago, and that he knew Pete Moss very well—old Moss, proprietor of a rooming house. "And his name on any document would make it genuine to me," he added.

Meade wavered slightly. "I might take that along and show it to the chief," he repeated.

"No," said Estabrook, "I couldn't let you have it to-night. I might have to produce that at the office. Besides, this business is largely a matter between the chief and me. I'll show it to him to-morrow."

But Meade's resolution became strengthened again. He shook his head. "All right," he said, "you can do what you think best to-morrow. But we're going to take our man along to-night. We've made the arrest and there's nothing to do but to take him to the station. If he's not the man wanted, a little investigation will get his release to-morrow. But to-night he goes with us."

Cape murmured where he lay on the bed, and moved uneasily. Meade looked at his watch.

Three-thirty—the hour at which he had been directed to bring his prisoner to the station.

But again Estabrook lifted a detaining hand. He couldn't think of permitting Cape to go to a cell after all. Not that it would matter so much in the long run, but for the moment it would give a complete warrant to the *News* for the story it was printing. That story which had been spirited away almost from under his eyes—at least from under the eyes of the two officers.

And then he realized that a weapon had been placed in his hands.

"All right, gentlemen," he said, "you may take Mr. Cape to the station if you like, though I assure you you're making a mistake. But before you go, please . . . there's a little matter I must ask you to explain. When I tell the chief to-morrow that you permitted a stranger to enter my room—this room here—during my absence and take away certain documents, thereby ruining my plans—what do you imagine he will say?"

The two officers glanced at each other. It was Meade who said—

"But he had your authority to come into the room!"

"He had not. I can only guess who he was. I didn't know of his being here until hours afterwards."

"But how——"

"The fact is," continued Estabrook, "that the

only good you could possibly have accomplished by being here was to prevent the very thing which you permitted to occur. My whole purpose in carrying on this affair secretly was to insure the safety of the information contained in that envelope which you permitted a stranger to remove from before your eyes."

Again Meade looked at Hankins. And then he smiled. "I see," he said. "Well, Mr. Estabrook, perhaps I was a little hasty in deciding that we'd be compelled to take Mr. Cape to the station. Since you assure us that a mistake has been made——" He made a signal to his companion, and both moved toward the door. "We'll just let the matter rest where it is. After all, as you said, it's mainly a matter between the chief and yourself. That's what we understood from the beginning." But at the door he turned. "But maybe you'd not find it necessary to speak to the chief about that fellow coming into the room. The fact is, he had so much nerve with him that I didn't think what he was about until he was gone."

Estabrook seemed to consider. "Perhaps I'll not find it necessary to speak to the chief about it after all," he said finally. And then—"But won't you gentlemen have a smoke before you go?"

He brought the box of cigars. Meade took a cigar and lit it. He was immediately puffing away in a finely jaunty manner. But Officer Han-

kins did not wish to smoke just then, it seemed. He took the proffered cigar and dropped it into his pocket with a practised air. And then Estabrook closed the door behind them.

Alone in the room, his first impulse was to rush to the bed, to drag Cape from it, to dance about him, to tell him the good news. And then an invisible hand stayed him. Cape's face was turned toward him now. And it seemed so amazingly smooth and young and wistful. Sadness was the quality which had become his habitual garb of late. Estabrook remained looking down at the slumbering youth for a long moment. Then he put his hand to his mouth and suppressed a yawn. He took out his watch and began to wind it. It seemed to be nearly run down. And then he took a seat in the most comfortable chair in the room. He moved the chair a time or two as if it weren't quite placed to suit him. Presently he had it over against the wall, where he could rest his feet on the window sill.

For a long time he pondered; and then he nodded; and then he slept.

He was awakened by Cape's eyes gazing at him, startled, yet forlorn, and by Cape's voice crying out in agonized tones—"Oh, what's happened?"

He got up sleepily and rubbed his eyes. A shaft of sunlight fell across the floor—a very

short shaft. He thought it must be very late—perhaps nearly noon. He turned and gazed into Cape's eyes. "Happened?" he repeated. How could he tell Cape in a word what had happened? "This is what has happened: the man who slew your uncle Pheneas Drumm died in this city early this morning. You're no more guilty of the crime than I am. There isn't a shadow hangs over you. You're innocent—and you're free."

He went to the window, opening it wide. He leaned out until a newsboy on the corner caught sight of him. And then he made a signal. A moment later he was reading his own story in the *Vidette*—really cleverly displayed, after all. And with a light almost of incredulity in his eyes he was reading the monstrously erroneous story in the *News*.

"Here," he said, thrusting the *Vidette* into Cape's hands. "Go to your room and read it. And take my word for it, no matter what you see anywhere else. It's the real story. I know, for I wrote it. Good-by." He almost literally thrust Cape out of the room.

He was tremendously eager to get to the office, to talk to Campbell, to explain things. But Campbell wouldn't be down for a long time yet. There wouldn't be a soul about the office.

He turned about, taking in the room in which he stood. It would be his last night in that room. He didn't like the place—and he didn't like

Madam Joan. He would clear out that very minute. He had only to put his hat on and all his possessions would be in hand.

He went to the cabinet and looked into it, to make sure. It contained nothing. He opened the little compartment above. And suddenly he smiled. His eyes were resting on a phonograph of a long-ago model, with a waxen cylinder. He recalled the one occasion when he had used it, and Cape's incredulous expression returned to him. He closed the door. He shouldn't want the miserable old phonograph again.

He was going out of the room—for good and all—when he ran into Cape. "You know I can't sleep," said Cape. "I've slept enough. And—where are you going?"

"I don't know. But I'm through with Madam Joan's. Im leaving."

"Well, wait a minute for me," said Cape; "for if you are, then I'm leaving, too. I'm going with you."

"You're going with me? Where?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. You see, we've got a lot to talk about."

"I suppose so. You want me to explain——"

"Yes, that, of course. Though I begin to see how it might have happened. It's funny such a thing never occurred to me, isn't it? But—you mustn't take offense, you know. What I really

want to talk about is—is a couple of—of partnerships!"

Madam Joan was just coming up the stairs as they descended. She was coming to summon Monsieur Estabrook. "A call on the telephone," she said.

Over the wire Estabrook heard a rasping voice inquire—"Is that you, Whispers?"

He stiffened with indignation; and then he relaxed. It was the voice of Beakman. "It's Estabrook," he replied shortly.

"Estabrook, yes. I've just gotten up from my virtuous couch, Estabrook," he said.

"A quaint expression, that," said Estabrook. "Where did you get it?"

"That's a very excellent story you've got in the *News* this morning. I'm much obliged!" continued the rasping voice.

"It's a much better one I've got in the *Vidette*. You're welcome."

He could feel that Beakman, startled, was listening for him to continue. And he added, "I don't want to dump any scrap iron into that virtuous couch of yours, Beakman, but I'm afraid your people face an awful libel suit if you printed that absurd rubbish you stole from me last night. Good-by." And he allowed the telephone receiver to slip back quietly into its place.

Chapter XXIX

Conclusion

A MONTH later Campbell was seated at his desk late at night, entertaining a friend—not a newspaper man—who had dropped in after the theater. The work of the day was done and most of the reporters had left the office. The rumbling of the presses could be heard down in the basement. An early edition of the *Vidette* was being run off.

Campbell, as he sat confronting his caller, fairly radiated happiness and contentment.

"It's a great life you fellows lead," remarked his friend, regarding him with pleasantly musing eyes, "a fascinating life."

"It is," agreed Campbell unaffectedly, smiling back at him.

"Yet I don't know that I envy you," continued the other. "I've an idea you must get a wrong point of view in a lot of ways. The rush and excitement of it all, and the restlessness—it must seem to you, little by little, that the world is nothing but a brawling tavern."

The smiling expression remained in Campbell's eyes. "But doesn't that pretty nearly describe life?" he asked; "—a 'brawling tavern'?"

"It doesn't for me."

But Campbell went on, evidently pleased with the figure: "With a few sages sitting apart at distant tables, trying not to be too greatly disturbed by the less experienced guests?"

His friend slowly shook his head. "It's far-fetched," he declared. "It's a romantic conception of an abnormal life."

"Abnormal?" echoed Campbell; "you mean the life of newspaper men?"

"Look at it yourself. You're an exception, of course. But think of the army of average reporters: their petty, habitual cynicism, their cocksure attitude toward life as a thing of shams and pretenses."

"Ah," said Campbell in a changed tone, "I see them differently. I think of their homelessness, and yet of a certain blitheness about them—as if they were too large, too universal, to require a little sheltered corner anywhere. When one of them takes his hat into his hand he is a sailor with his ship, a soldier with his sword, a crusader with his cause. What if there be a certain irrepressibleness about them? Nature gives to each of us the armor that we need." His eyes slowly beamed as he added, "You ought to have known Whispers!"

He mused a moment; and then in response to his friend's inquiring glance he continued:

"His real name was Estabrook. He was one

of my reporters until recently. The oddest chap I ever knew, I think. I couldn't hope to describe him. But—I happen to think of a sort of illustration. He was on the street one day talking to a United States Senator from one of the rural states. You know in the very nature of things a newspaper man must waste a good deal of his time. Well, along came a mendicant—a raw-boned Irishman who probably hadn't done a day's work in years. He sized up Estabrook and the senator, and he spoke to Estabrook. 'Excuse me, brother,' he said, 'but could I speak to you?' 'Sure, Mike!' was Estabrook's reply. The man's name must have been Mike, it seemed—his face lit up so quickly; as if he had heard his own name for the first time in ages. And he said: 'Could you spare me a dime? I'll tell you the truth—I want to buy a drink. I need a drink bad.' And Estabrook gave him a coin. 'I'll give you the price,' he said; and then with mock solemnity he added, 'but be sure you don't go and buy food with it!' The mendicant gave him back the beaming glance of a brother—a brother born in another town. And then he was lost in the crowd."

"The point being——?" asked Campbell's visitor.

"The point being that there's a deeper cynicism which holds that evil is just a sham—not merely that there are shams in goodness or greatness."

They remained silent a moment, listening to

the rumbling of the presses down in the basement; and then Campbell's caller asked:

"What became of him—your benevolent cynic?"

"The precious pair—he and the young fellow Cape, who figured in the Drumm case—went off to Texas, or Oklahoma, or somewhere, last week. Cape insisted on lending him all the money he needed for a venture he'd gotten into. It was Cape's idea to make him an outright present of the money, but Estabrook, it seemed, wouldn't listen to that. He declared that just the loan of it would place him in a position where he'd be guiltily wealthy in a few years. And really I don't doubt it. As security for the loan he gave Cape an interest in his business—a newspaper in a town that's growing at the rate of a thousand a day. I fully expect the thing to turn out just as Estabrook says it will."

He leaned back in his chair in an attitude so completely cheerful that his visitor was prompted to say: "The *Vidette* is coming into its own pretty rapidly these days, isn't it?"

"It's amazing," said Campbell enthusiastically. "And I admit I feel we owe much of that to Estabrook. He stayed on after the Drumm affair to write a series of stories for me and they were very successful. And really, after the *News* published its retraction of the story about Cape—Cape exacted that they publish it on the first page, just

where the original story had appeared, as you may remember—it seemed that the tide had turned in our favor. We've got the *News* on the run. They've let out Beakman, but it seems they took that step too late. The *Vidette* has gained 30,000 circulation in the past thirty days and it's still going strong." He added, after a moment's pause, "I really think Estabrook woke us up a little."

"A queer name—what did you call him, Whispers?"

"Yes," said Campbell. "But he was given another name that I like to remember: 'a funny guy'! I am sure that will stick to my memory. Rightly spoken it fits him perfectly—a funny guy."

He glanced behind him at the clock on the wall, and then he pulled the lid of his desk down for the night.

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